



A WHITE WOMAN SHOCKS THE WHOLE CITY

25c

Angel

CURTIS LUCAS



A LION ORIGINAL
NOT A REPRINT

162

She joined his church.

She bought him a car.

She got him a job, gave him
money, paid his rent.

She was white. He was Negro.

R. H. Dickenson

Angel is a story of murder and
religion, of young desire and
adulterous lusts—

Angel is a story of love that
steps across the color line.



ANGEL

is

A Lion Original

Curtis Lucas

ANGEL



A LION BOOK

by arrangement with Classic Syndicate, Inc.

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ANGEL

A LION ORIGINAL

by special arrangement with the author

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A LION BOOK



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CHAPTER I

COACH FRED VEEK spat on the sidewalk, and the pale redness of the spittle told him that his lip had been cut when the colored boy hit him in the dressing room after the game. He opened his mouth, working his upper lip, then ran his tongue along the inside portion, finding the cut. He sucked at the inside of his upper lip, then spat again.

The splotch on the sidewalk was a deeper red.

"The son of a bitch!" he said, the surprise and the anger deep inside him.

He hadn't thought Duke Bolden would hit him. During all Duke Bolden's three years on Varsity the coach had ridden him. Little things, unfriendly little words. Afternoons when it was raining hard and the squad listened as Fred VEEK outlined certain plays, he always worked in a thinly veiled story aimed at the colored boy. Usually there was a colored girl or woman in the story. Rubbing it in, using all the gestures, hoping to get the colored boy fed up, trying to make him lose his temper, criticizing him in the dressing room between halves, claiming Duke was misplaying his position at left end.

But the colored boy had refused to be baited. "All right," Duke had always said. "I'll try to do better—I'll try to play the way you want me to."

And the colored boy had always played brilliant football. He was a natural end, fast and deceptive, with that in-born something which always enabled him to be in the right place at the right time. During all his three years on Varsity the colored boy had been outstanding.

More than that. He had made friends among the other boys on the team, the newspapers had nothing but praise for his hard-hitting, aggressive type of football, and he was backed personally by Howard Cannon, who was one of the heaviest contributors to University's Alumni Association.

Fred Veek spat again, then walked north on High Street taking the long, slightly lumbering strides of the middle-aged athlete. He was a tall, big man, full-faced and muscular; there were signs of meanness and dissipation in his eyes. The deepness of the wrinkles under his eyes and around his mouth, together with the sharply marked protuberance of his belly, told the tale of a once-powerful man sloppily growing older.

He turned at Summer Street, went half way down the block to the parking lot.

The Negro attendant took the parking stub from him, looked at it, said, "Your car's right over there, sir."

Fred Veek started toward the car, and the Negro walked along beside him.

"Well, we won again," he said.

Fred Veek grunted.

"It was a good game," the Negro said wistfully, not aware of the coach's hostile silence. "Wish I could've seen it."

Fred Veek did not look at the attendant. His eyes were rapidly clouding, and the warm flush of rising anger was in his face. His big chest became bigger with each indrawn breath.

"Duke Bolden sure played some fine football," the attendant said. "Wish I could've seen him."

Fred Veek opened his mouth, but no words came. He put his hand on the door handle, twisted, opened the car door. The hand trembled.

"Yes, sir!" the attendant said, blissfully ignorant of the white man's anger. "Duke sure can play football."

Fred Veek pushed his big body into the car. His face was flushed brick-red, his eyes half closed and smoky with anger.

"I think Duke Bolden's the best left end in—"

The coach slammed the door. He pressed the starter button, shifted to "drive," then leaned forward, his face out the window.

"Why th' hell don't you keep that big hole under your flat nose shut?" he shouted angrily.

Then, while the attendant stood there in shocked surprise, Fred Veek jerked the car around savagely, turning toward the exit. The attendant leaped quickly to one side as the car shot past him.

Coach Fred Veek drove fast. He swore loudly, bitterly, and with almost unbelievable obscenity. He hated Negroes, and he had not wanted Duke Bolden on his football team. But the long, lean colored boy was Howard Cannon's pet. During summer vacations Duke worked as a laborer for the Cannon Construction Company, with old man Cannon's personal blessings. In the fall he played football at University, where old man Cannon himself had gone many years before. What could he—Fred Veek—do? The boys and girls at University liked Duke Bolden. The newspapers praised him, and Howard Cannon backed him. University itself went in for high-powered, big money athletics, and Duke Bolden was the best in college circles.

Hate the boy though Fred Veek did, he still had to use him, had to build plays around him. He had to do it to keep his job. He used him for three whole years. He criticized him—yes. He taunted him—yes. He insulted him—yes.

For three whole years on Varsity.

And then—today—after the last game of the season—after four seasons at University and three of them on the Varsity team—Duke Bolden had turned on him. The colored boy had played it smart. He had taken everything the coach had dished out as long as he was eligible to play football. For three years he had starred, patiently enduring all of Fred Veek's nastiness.

Today the colored boy had played his last game. Today he had been just as brilliant as ever.

But afterward, in the dressing room, he had been a different colored boy. Afterward, when coach Fred Veek just couldn't resist making one last crack at Duke Bolden. . .

The coach swore with a new bitterness as he thought of it. The colored boy had hit him so quickly and so hard. And the others had been glad. He had seen the gladness on

their faces. Sure, they had rushed in to separate them. Sure, they had said the right things. But they liked Duke Bolden, and they hated Fred Veek. Even though he was their coach—even though they played winning football under him—they still hated him.

And their faces showed how damned glad they were when the colored boy let him have it.

He thought of all this as he drove. After a long time he slowed down, his anger slowly simmering. It was already twilight. Turning into a little side street in the factory section of the city, he drove halfway down the block and parked near a gnarled old tree which stood leafless and ugly in the November bleakness.

Fred Veek exhaled his breath heavily. He took off his hat and put it on the seat beside him, his horseshoe-like bald spot shining faintly in the half light. For a moment he sat still, slouched over the wheel as if half asleep, bareheaded and tired.

Finally he stirred. Opening the door to the glove compartment, he took out a pint of scotch and held the bottle up to the windshield, straining his tired eyes to see how much of the whiskey was left in the bottle. It was half full. He took a paper cup from the glove compartment, poured generously of the whiskey. The hand that held the cup was unsteady, trembling, so that a little of it spilled on his trouser leg. This he ignored and raised the cup eagerly, moving his mouth downward to meet the cup and swallowing the liquid with quick, greedy gulps.

He relaxed somewhat after the drink, feeling less tired as the whiskey crawled warmly in his belly.

“Damned blab-mouthed slob!” he muttered, thinking of the Negro attendant in the parking lot. “Should have bashed his thick skull in for him.”

Then he thought of Duke Bolden and scowled darkly, knowing that his anger should be turned toward the colored athlete and regretting the fact that he could do nothing. Duke was young and powerful; he was older and slower and

dissipated. When the boys had parted them they had done Fred Week a favor, for the colored boy surely would have beaten him had they been allowed to fight it out.

He poured another drink, swallowed it in the same greedy way, but the gnawing dissatisfaction was still inside him. He sat there thinking. What good was it to be the coach of a winning football team, when victory had led only to humiliation by Duke Bolden? Victory was like a cup of coffee in the morning, sweet and appetizing, but Duke Bolden was like the fly that gagged him when he found it at the bottom of the cup.

He took another drink. He started swearing again.

He had finished his third straight year without a defeat. Three years—three long, goddam years! Three years of a colored boy whom he hated. How many times during those three years had his job been in jeopardy? How many times had he been on the verge of being fired because of his excessive drinking and his reckless affairs with girl students at University? In the last three years how many times had sports writers dropped little hints in their columns, telling the world that all was not well between him and University's colored star?

He poured another drink, and the bottle was almost empty. That did not bother him—there was another pint in the glove compartment. And he would stop at a package store later.

He lighted a cigarette and sat in the car smoking, while night settled firmly over the city. The whiskey boosted his ego and aroused his lust. He thought of the many high-school and college girls he had had in his younger days, and he remembered the ones who had escaped him—those whom he would never have. He shook his head a little sadly, realizing that he was nearing fifty, that he was a long way down the road to alcoholism, and that he was full of an old man's lustful ways.

He killed the first pint, opened the one in the glove compartment.

He drank very slowly now, thinking of other days when he had coached at other colleges. He had been younger then, and there had been no Negro athletes to aggravate him. His eyes softened. He was dreaming of the way the girls had been—how easy it had been for him to lure them away from the fumbling, inexperienced college boys. Those had been beautiful, wonderful days.

He thought of Alice Caldwell, and his eyes clouded. He had had fun with Alice at first. It had been fun when she first came to University, and it had lasted until the year before. Then she had cut him off, cold. He couldn't understand why. "I'm a big girl now," was all she had ever told him.

It bothered him. It was funny about Alice Caldwell—she wasn't beautiful, and she wasn't smart. She was no good in her studies, and she wasn't popular with the other girls at University. But she had an irresistible something about her that no other girl at University possessed. Wherever she went the college boys were there, drooling around her. She flirted with them, spurned them, laughed *with* them, laughed *at* them, teased them, and had no high opinion of any of them. The college boys followed her in droves, only half understanding that all her appeal was based on one questionable thing. They never quite seemed to realize that she was a completely developed woman, even at her age—that to her all of them were too young.

But Fred Veek had seen, and he had understood. He was old enough, mature, experienced. Alice had no love for him, she had no concern for him; in fact she seemed to hate him. But that night at the dance, after the football game, he offered her a ride in his car, and she went willingly. It was raining—a mean, knifing little rain. He had parked the car in a narrow little street, such as the one where he was now drinking. When he kissed her she kissed him back, running her tongue over and around his, biting his bottom lip softly.

But when he bent her backward on the seat of the car she fought him.

"What do you think this is—your birthday?" she demanded.

He laughed softly. "Yes."

"I don't give away birthday presents," she snapped.

"Why, honey," he said easily, "I don't ask women to give me birthday presents—I take them!"

And he took her then for the first time. . .

He tilted the second pint over the cup, remembering those days. Alice had been a strange, new experience for him. In all his years he had never met a girl-woman like her. She seemed to hate him. At times she looked at him as if she would enjoy spitting on him. At other times she would look at him as if she did not see him—as if he were not there at all.

But she had gone out in his car again and again.

And that was the strangest part about the whole thing, for Alice never actually gave herself to him. Always he had to take her in the same brutal manner that he had done the first time. After a while he grew to expect it that way and to enjoy it that way.

Then she had ended it all just as abruptly as she had let it begin. She no longer had any use for Fred Week.

Suddenly he didn't want to drink any more. He wanted Alice. He wanted her the way she had been, with that same oozing attraction, that same sex appeal. He thought of the way he had seen her at dances this last year. Completely mature, sure of herself, and a standout in any crowd. Sometimes, but not often, she was alone, leaning against the wall and watching the other dancers, looking aloof and full of contempt. As if she despised the others, especially the girls. At other times the college boys would be around her like flies. A moment later she would be over in a corner of the ballroom with the boys from the team, laughing at jokes that only male ears should ever hear. In a little while she would be out on the dance floor doing crazy dance steps with Duke Bolden, whom Fred Week hated.

Fred Veek hated the colored boy most when he saw him dancing with the girl whom he—Fred Veek—had once taken at will, but whom he could no longer have.

Fred Veek flung away his cigarette, sudden resolve in the moment. There was a dance later that night to celebrate University's third untied, undefeated year. The students would be there—boys and girls dancing and clowning and doing a moderate amount of drinking. There would be petting and long walks into the night, and afterward there would be the automobiles and the other things that went with college students' dances.

Alice Caldwell would be there.

Fred Veek started the motor and drove the car slowly out of the little street. If only he could get Alice into his car again, the way he used to do. If he had her in a quiet little street like this again, he would take her again. Then why not get her into the car, he thought. Why not make her leave those fumbling, inexperienced college boys who didn't know anything but football and school books and dirty jokes? Why not make her stop dancing with Duke Bolden, the colored boy whom he hated. He could do it. And, by God, he would!

He had reached that pleasant stage of intoxication where he believed he could do almost anything. Once he got her into his car she would not escape. She had never escaped once she was in his car. He knew just how it would be with her. Hard at first, the way it had always been. Hard, the way he liked it. Already he could feel how it would be as she struggled. He could hear her panting, the way she had panted before.

After tonight she would go out with him often. The way it used to be.

Yes, he thought, the way it used to be. Everything will be the way it used to be.

He was impatient for the beginning of the dance. He stopped at a package store and bought another pint.

CHAPTER II

THERE WAS NOTHING BEAUTIFUL about Alice Caldwell, but she managed to create an illusion of beauty. This illusion had something to do with the way she smiled—sometimes lazily, sometimes teasingly. Then there were the times when she didn't smile, the times when one caught glimpses of almost unbelievable depths in her eyes and in the pensiveness of her face. At other times the hint of cruelty could be seen in the set of her lips—a cruelty which had a deadly attractiveness.

The siren-like quality of the girl had something to do with the way she walked, somehow bringing a kind of indecent flowing grace into her movements; it had something to do with the prominence of her hips and breasts and long, perfect legs. Then there was her face, slightly elongated with almost-hollow cheeks, which had a feminine wolfish, hungry look about it.

She was deliberately cruel to the boys at University, smiling, teasing them, raising their hopes and giving them nothing. She was nineteen years old, would be twenty the following spring, yet she was fully matured and woman-wise. Always male students flocked around her, and the female students at University hated her for it.

They talked of the way she casually walked into classrooms with lighted cigarettes. They watched indignantly while she used all her wiles to captivate the college boys, beguiling them, preying upon their inexperience. They noted the way she went around the campus with Duke Bolden, the long, lean football star, sometimes holding onto his arm and smiling at him in that teasing, puzzling way, while the colored boy looked at her in wonderment.

They saw the pleasure she took in torturing the football players by openly flirting with Fred Veek, while they looked helplessly on with hate in their eyes.

They saw her enter the ballroom that night after the game, alone. She paused just inside the door, looked around the ballroom, her eyes very deep, a faint smile on her face. She moved across the floor in that slow, flowing walk of hers, drawing attention to herself, looking tall and slender and cool and immaculate.

She walked slowly almost to the center of the floor. Then she stopped still and turned to her left and walked unhurriedly over to the corner where the football players were talking about the game. When she reached them she smiled and let them feel the shock of her deep eyes.

"Hi, fellas," she said simply.

They answered her in a chorus. Eagerly they gathered about her, making wisecracks, noisily clamoring for her attention. She smiled amusedly at the way they vied with each other, rivals for her patronage. She was afraid of none of them and had no high opinion of any of them. Yet she was far too smart to favor any one of them over the others.

"Nice game you boys played today," she said.

One of the boys smiled. He was tall, with an olive skin, black hair, and seemed almost too handsome to be a football player. His name was Eddie Carboni, and he threw most of the team's forward passes.

"It wasn't us," Eddie said. "Duke's the one. Did you see the catches he made? And what about that interception?"

The colored boy, standing tall among them, shook his head. Then he looked at Alice and smiled awkwardly. She watched the colored boy curiously. She let him have her slow smile; she leaned just the least bit forward, with the flowing grace in the movement and all the deepness in her eyes. And the face was there and the body—the almost-hollow cheeks, the breasts, and the tall thinness of her.

She spoke softly, in her low, husky voice. "Yes," she said. "You played a nice game, Duke." Then she laughed suddenly. "And after the game, big boy," she said, "you gave that half-assed bigshot what he had coming to him. I heard about it."

For a moment she could see the hurt and pain in the colored boy's eyes, and she knew her words had shocked him. Then his lids dropped down over his eyes, and she couldn't be sure just what the colored boy was feeling.

"It wasn't me alone in the game," he said, his eyes still averted. "All of us were in there pitching. And Eddie just kept throwing the ball right into my arms—what else could I do but hold on to it?"

Eddie grinned. "I couldn't have missed you if I tried, Duke. You looked eight feet tall going down the field and as big as a barn. I could've hit you with my eyes closed."

"Oh, hell," Alice said. "You boys give me a quick pain you-know-where. Every damned one of you played a good game, and you know it!"

They all laughed. And they looked at the girl with deepest admiration. She was a regular girl—one of the bunch. She smiled and laughed and let her attraction ooze over them, while they talked about football and told dirty jokes, and when her turn came she told one without batting an eyelash.

The colored boy didn't tell any jokes, and he didn't talk much. Mostly he looked at Alice, and that hangdog expression which she knew so well was in his eyes. Occasionally she smiled at him, directly and brilliantly, as if there was some special secret between the two of them. Whenever she did this, he smiled back, and the hangdog expression left his eyes.

The band started playing a rhumba.

"Let's dance, Alice," Duke said.

"Right," Alice said. "I was beginning to wonder whether this was going to be a dance or a drag."

She gave him that dazzling smile. Then she suddenly struck a boxer's pose, feinted, motioned at him with a right. And all the while she was smiling. He answered by parrying and fading back. He laughed softly, and there was joy on his face and in his eyes.

She caught his arm and turned toward the dance floor.

"Let's dance," she said simply.

They came to the dance floor, and Alice said, "I'm going to enjoy myself tonight, Duke."

He nodded, and for a while they didn't talk any more. They were both good dancers, and together they were excellent. She stood tall, but he was a good four inches above her. On the dance floor, as on the football field, Duke seemed to know just what to do and how to do it. Lithe and muscular, he moved in perfect time to the pulse beats of the bongas. Alice, caught in the magic of the bongas and the mad, cackling laughter of the maracas, lost herself in the dance steps.

It was a dance of shoulders and breasts and hips and legs. The soft lights caught each provocative shift as they slithered through the sinuous dance. Alice laughed, and the maracas giggled. Duke smiled constantly, and the light in his eyes was shining.

"You having fun, Duke?"

"You bet!"

"You deserve to have fun. After that game you played today—"

"I guess I was lucky, that's all."

They didn't miss a beat as they talked. He raised her hand, holding it just above her head, and she went around in a beautiful slow rhumba gait. For a moment they came together.

"Glad you're graduating this year?" she asked.

"In a way."

"What'll you do after?"

"Try professional football, I guess."

"It's awfully rough with the pros."

"But they pay good money."

She laughed. "I guess there could be better inducement," she said, "but offhand I don't know what it could be."

They danced close to each other, they danced apart, circling one another, turning around and around. They turned side by side, they danced face to face and back to back; they went up and down the floor, following the rhumba beat, while

other couples turned to watch. They looked at each other and laughed often.

"What made you hit him after all this time?" she asked suddenly.

For a moment he didn't say anything. The happy light had gone out of his eyes and the old brooding look was there again. She danced with her head held back, watching him.

"He had it coming," Duke said at last. "He had it coming for a long time."

He said nothing, just looked at her as she danced. The rustle of silk on the dance floor was like whispering shadows, and the crackling maracas gave out all their sprite-like sibilance.

She kept her eyes on him now. "You didn't like the way I called him a half-assed bigshot, did you?"

"Listen," he said, "listen. . ." He stopped for a moment, his mouth quivering a little, and there was pain in his eyes. And for a while the music and the silky rustling washed over them. Then he had control of himself, and he said in a low voice, "Don't say things like that, Alice. You're too good to be saying things like that."

She watched him, her eyes deep, her face enigmatic. The music ended with frightening abruptness, leaving couples in the middle of body shifts.

Alice laughed, her hand still cool and smooth in his. "This is a good time to sit down for a moment, don't you think?"

"If you want to."

She looked about the dance hall briefly and said, "There's a place over there. Room enough for two."

She went before him toward a small bench, and the way she walked was like a rhumba, only it was softer and more sinuous. She sat down and turned her eyes upward to look at him at the same time, and the motion was graceful and warm and intimate. She indicated the place beside her, and he sat down.

She smiled at him.

"What else will you do beside football after you graduate, Duke? What about the girl back home?"

"What girl?"

She said, "There's always a girl, Duke. The one you grew up with, maybe."

He watched the dance floor, and she watched him. The band was playing a waltz now, and couples glided over the floor. The girls dipped and swayed and the air caught under the silk and stirred their skirts wide and made them balloon, then let them settle softly, and there was a mellow richness to the silken rustle.

Duke spoke. "Her name is Rida, Rida Malloy. She goes to State Teacher's. She's going to teach primary students, and she wants me to get a degree in physical education."

She watched his face. "Is she nice?"

"Yeah. We went to Sunday School and church together, and we sang in the junior choir and all that."

"Do you love her, Duke?"

He didn't answer her directly. "We were always together. I took her to high-school dances. People always said we were suited for each other—always going to church, even after we got bigger. We even go to church and Sunday School now when we go home in the summer."

"What kind of church do you go to, Duke?"

"It's Methodist. African Methodist."

"Are you very religious?"

"I don't know—hardly. I've just always gone to church, and I guess I always will. I like to go to church."

"And this girl—this Rida—do you love her?" she pressed.

Still he didn't answer her. But the hangdog look came back into his eyes, and she smiled, feeling a deep glow of satisfaction. She knew the tall colored boy was in love with her, and the knowledge pleased her. She wanted men to love her—all kinds of men.

She watched him intently, and all of a sudden he looked up and found her eyes on him. They looked at each other then he turned his eyes away, ashamedly.

Alice stood up. "I guess it's about time for us to get back to the rest of the fellas," she said.

She walked before him. And for a moment her lips curled, and the hint of cruelty was deep on them.

CHAPTER III

FRED VEEK stood alone, watching Alice as she danced with the tall colored boy. He had been drinking steadily since twilight. Now the whiskey glow was bright and deep and warm within him. He possessed that keenness of insight, that sharpness of perception which comes to men when they reach that narrow perimeter separating the heavily intoxicated from the totally drunk.

He was watchful, alert. His mind searched out and saw the girl in a new way. He knew what she was, understood why she would be intimate with him night after night for a time, then cut off their relationship the way a housewife turns off a faucet. In that weaving creature of eyes and breasts and hips and legs he saw out there with the Negro lived a wanton soul whose goal was to win and possess and destroy.

He noticed the close harmony between the two dancers, and jealousy burned within him. He knew that the two were mentally intimate, that physical intimacy was only a question of time and mood and opportunity. He knew that color would mean nothing to her except to arouse her interest and drive her to the Negro.

Ah, he thought, I bet she would. That's the way it is. That's the destiny of her kind. She'll go on and on, conquering, wrecking, shattering, owning, and destroying. She'll dispense of her favors with any man until she owns him, and then she'll spit on him to show her contempt.

He smiled, his full face glowing with masterful triumph. But she'll never have me that way, he thought. I've known all kinds of women, and no nineteen-year-old hussy can do that to me. I'll get her again, the way I got her before. In

my car. And when I'm through with her I'll kick her out, treat her like the slut she is.

Unconsciously he was pacing about, talking to himself, so that dancers looked at him questioningly. But he saw only the nineteen-year-old girl and the colored left end. He watched as they left the floor, saw them sit together alone in the seclusion of the corner bench. He saw the colored boy looking at her, beaming, smiling. The damn black fool, he thought. The damn black fool with the big fat mouth. What the hell does he think *he* can do with her?

He paced the floor and he fumed, and the fever of desire burned fiercely in his bloodshot eyes. In his mind was the little drama as it would be played in his car—the demanding, the protests, the struggle. It would be hard—he wanted it to be hard. But he would be masterful; he would be forceful. He reached out one hand before him, as if he was already stroking one of her full breasts. She would be his. And afterward, when it was over, his would be the gloating.

He watched them steadily. After a long time he saw them leave the bench and go over to where the other football players stood, saw the boys gather in a tight circle about the girl. He let the corners of his mouth break in a superior smile, knowing that they were indulging in the silly pastime of telling dirty jokes.

When the band started playing again he walked leisurely to where she stood with them. He watched her deep eyes as he approached, seeing the way she turned to look at him. They looked at each other hard, knowingly, and with reckless disregard for the football players.

He said, "Come on, Alice. Let's teach these kids how to dance."

He kept his eyes on her. He saw the way she looked at the football players, saw how she smiled her mysterious, half-amused smile. He saw how she took in the flashes of hate in the boys' eyes. He saw how she looked at Duke a long time, saw how her smile rapidly became enigmatic. Then her eyes came back to him.

"Sure, Fred," she said. "Let's teach them how."

And watching her as he did, he saw how the smile left her face, saw the way her lips curled, and saw all the cruelty in the set of her mouth. He led her away from the boys.

And in the corner the football players stood in silence. Hate and hurt and contempt were in their eyes. After a long time Eddie Carboni laughed bitterly.

"She called him a half-assed bigshot," he said. "Her own words. Now look who's dancing with him."

None of the other boys said anything. They saw the way she followed coach Fred Week, saw the hips and the legs, saw the way her skirt whipped about her and saw the possessiveness of the coach.

Duke Bolden didn't say anything. But the misery and the hurt was there in his eyes.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE FLOOR she rested one hand on Fred Week's shoulder as they danced. He noticed how, now and then, the cruelty was plain in the set of her mouth. Girls have changed, he thought, young girls are different in their manners and morals. Time was when you could depend on them to be timid. Young girls might go to bed with older men, they might steal husbands from other women, they might get into trouble, then go to see a doctor who could fix things.

But at least they had certain niceties about them, he thought. At least they wore a feminine front.

But the teen-age girl today is a hard breed, he decided. The only feminine things about them now are their pretty faces and hair and breasts and hips and legs. They are predatory. They are guilty of every moral offense in the book, and they know a few that never got around to being printed. They keep men in a perpetual state of defense—these young girls outtalk us, they outcurse us, outdo us, and outsin us. At least, he thought, that's what they do to most men. But they can't do me that way. I'm too smart, even for them.

He watched the girl as they danced. And to have a decent, innocent name like Alice, he thought. Names didn't mean anything these days either. He studied her smile. She had the fascination, she had the air of strangeness. From her person emanated that maddening attraction which even beautiful girls could not hope to rival. Fred Veek gloated a little as he thought of what lay ahead for him. Beautiful girls could not rival her, but he, Fred Veek, could take her.

He said, "You shouldn't waste all your time on these kids, honey."

"Why not?"

Her eyes were deep, her smile enigmatic.

He pulled her closer to him.

"All your smiles," he whispered, "all your talent for acting, baby. Those kids don't know how to appreciate it. It's lost on them. They don't know from nothing."

She said, "They know enough, Fred Veek. I always have a swell time with them."

"You don't know what a swell time is, honey. Me—I could show you a real good time."

She smiled slowly. And then her mouth went very cruel.

"Maybe you could," she said deliberately. "Maybe you've learned something new. But I tried you before, and you couldn't show me a thing."

She said it deliberately, purposely, with all the intent to wound. It hit him hard—made him flinch.

"That's a lie!" he said. "You know damned well that's a lie."

"You left me cold," she said. "You were just a fat old man breathing down on my face."

It was a slap in the face. He stared at her, feeling sudden horror of this young girl—this girl of nineteen—who had so much cruelty on her lips and so much acid on her tongue. Then he recovered himself. He watched the way she was studying him, her eyes a little brazen, a little teasing, and very amused. She was so cool, so sure of herself.

He said, "I'm a man, Alice. I'm a man, and I can move you."

"Your words sound fine, Fred Week. But you can't prove them—not by me."

"You—" he started in anger, and then he checked himself.

All right, he thought. I know her—know what she is like. It's her nature. She likes to torture. She's trying to torture me. The way she tortures those college punks. Tantalize them, lead them on, make them jealous, spurn them, disappoint them, do anything to hurt them. That's the way she is, the nature of her. She can do that to the college boys. They don't understand it. But she can't do this to me—not to Fred Week. I'm too smart for it.

He said, "Don't get me wrong, Alice. I'm not one of those kids."

"So?"

"I won't eat out of your hand the way they do."

"Do they eat out of my hands, Fred?"

"You know they do," he told her.

"I know they like me. And I like men to like me."

"Even the colored boy?"

She smiled. "Even the colored boy."

"You know he's crazy about you?" he asked. "You want him to be crazy about you? You like him to hang around like a stray dog, looking at you that way?"

She let her voice become serious. "I don't think that's true. But if it is, I'm proud of it. Duke Bolden is all right in my book."

"I'd like to kick him where it'd do the most good."

She laughed softly. "Why didn't you do it after the game when he hit you?"

He didn't answer her. She laughed bitingly.

He said, "If it wasn't for old man Howard Cannon and all his money—" He left it unfinished.

"I'm glad somebody is backing him," she said. "I'm glad you couldn't kick him around when he came to University. And I don't mind if he does like me."

"No," he said bitterly. "You wouldn't mind. You like it. You want everything in pants to be crazy about you. But you'll never be crazy about anyone but yourself."

"What makes you say that?"

"I know you, Alice. I know your kind."

"You don't have a very good opinion of me then?"

He changed abruptly. "Sure, honey. I admire you for being that way. It makes you happy, and it makes the boys happy. Especially Duke. God, but that colored boy thinks you're an angel or something."

"And what do you think I am, Fred?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"I asked you, didn't I?"

"You sure did!" he said.

He pulled her closer to him and put his mouth to her ear. This is the way to play it; he thought. He put all his forty-seven years of practice into the way he did it. The idea, he thought, was to shock and insult her, to anger her, but not to drive her away from him. That was the only way to treat her kind. He held her so tightly that he could feel her knees strike against his as they danced, that her stomach was against his, and her breasts pressed at his chest.

"You're a bitch!" he whispered. "You're the cruelest, most exciting bitch I ever saw!"

She stiffened for a moment, her eyes going very deep, her face becoming a mask. Then she smiled crookedly.

"I asked for it," she said.

"You sure did."

"And what is a bitch supposed to do when somebody says something like that to her?"

"Just what you said."

"Thanks," she said. "I asked for it again."

He said, "You keep sticking your chin out, Alice, I keep hitting."

"Let's just dance," she told him.

They finished the dance in silence. Then, when she started back to the group in the corner, he caught her roughly by

the shoulder and turned her around. They stood gazing levelly at each other, and there was an electric tenseness about the moment.

He said, "No hard feelings, Alice?"

"No hard feelings, Fred."

"All right," he said, and his voice was rough, "why don't you stick around. Why don't you dance with me and let that bunch of kids go on telling their dirty jokes?"

She smiled again. "Why not, Fred?"

They danced several times, and he noticed that she had changed perceptibly. She was no longer insulting. When he pulled her ever closer to him, she didn't seem to mind. That's the way to treat her kind, he thought. Be rough with her. Bring her down front. You're still Fred Week. You still know how to handle young girls. Even young tramps like her.

He said, "You're okay, Alice."

"I thought you said I was a bitch."

"All right," he said. "You're a swell bitch."

"I led with my chin again," she said.

"You keep doing it over and over, kid."

She was quiet after that. He felt great. That's the way to do it, he thought. Always lead, always attack. Keep them on the defense. That's the only way to master them.

"Let's get out of here," he said finally. "Let's go for a ride."

"I don't know—"

"Aw, come on," he said. "What the hell. You ain't afraid to go for a ride with me."

"Well—all right."

They walked out into the night, and the music from the band followed them.

Back in a corner of the ballroom the football players looked sourly at the door through which they had gone.

"Son of a bitch!" Eddie Carboni said.

There was silence in the group. Duke Bolden moved uneasily about, tall, lean, powerfully built—and Negro.

Somebody laughed harshly.

"This half-assed world!" another said. "Oh, this goddam, worthless, half-assed world!"

CHAPTER V

THEY SAT IN Fred Week's car, and he started the motor.

"It's cool," he said. "I'll get some heat in the old buggy."

Alice was quiet in the darkness of the car. Fred Week turned on the radio, and they listened to the music.

"I thought we were going for a ride, Fred."

"It's all right where we are, honey," he said. "Right here in the parking lot. Nice and dark and snug." He laughed.

She said, "What makes you think I'm a bitch, Fred?"

"Because you are."

"Do you think that just because I let you—"

"Hell, no! A bitch is a bitch. I don't care what she does, she'll still be one."

"That's just what you think, Fred. Others don't think so."

"Look," he said. "I'm not saying you're the same to everybody. To me you're a bitch. To others you might be something else." He laughed. "To Duke Bolden you're an angel. You're a real angel to that colored boy—with wings and everything."

"I wish you'd leave him out of it, Fred. He's too good for you to talk about him like that. He's too good inside."

"He's colored."

"All right, Fred." Her voice was low, tight, and husky.

"To hell with it," he said. "To hell with Duke Bolden. He graduates in the spring, and I won't see him any more. What I need now—what we both need—is a drink."

He reached across her to the glove compartment and got the full pint of scotch. He took two cups from the glove compartment, handed her one.

"Here, baby, this'll put life into the party."

"I don't want any, Fred."

"Aw, come on, honey, let's be merry."

"No Fred," she said.

"All right. To hell with it. Fred can drink by himself. You don't mind, do you, honey?"

"Go ahead."

He poured, but not too much. He put the cap back on the bottle, pulled the lever which sealed the cap tightly. He put the bottle on the floor of the car, between his legs and her legs.

He drank the whiskey in a single gulp. Then he turned off the car motor and switched off the radio.

"Don't want to run down my battery," he said.

"But I want to hear the music," she protested. "It sounds good."

He turned the radio back on. "All right, honey," he said. "Anything for you, honey."

They sat there and listened to the music. She hummed softly to herself. All right, he thought. No use rushing things. I got plenty time. Let her get mellow. If I rush things too much, I might spoil everything.

He said, "You're all right by me, Alice. You're a woman, and you got your sides. Women have so many sides to their make-up. I guess different men bring out different sides of women. Me, I like the way you are now. We understand each other, honey."

"All right, Fred. Let it go."

He put his arm about her, pulled her close to him.

"Honey," he said, "you been keeping yourself away from me a long time. Too goddam long. I missed you, honey."

She said nothing.

"The way you talked tonight, honey," he said. "The things you said back there—you didn't mean them, did you? We had swell times together, didn't we, honey?"

"I don't know, Fred."

"You know we had fun, honey. You know damned well it was fun. The way it's going to be fun tonight."

She said nothing.

He held her tightly, tried to kiss her. She put both her hands to his chest and pushed him away.

"Don't do that, Fred. Please."

He said, "What the goddam hell!"

"Why don't you spit on me?" she blazed suddenly. "That would be less insulting than calling me a bitch and trying to kiss me."

He laughed. "Well, I'll be damned! Honey, don't try to play the lady with me. We know different. Don't act like that, baby. For Christ's sake, don't act like that."

He tried to take her into his arms again, but she was all stiff. When she spoke there was contempt in her voice.

"Is this going to be a wrestling match, Fred?"

For a moment he was angry. Then he became cagey. He had time—he wouldn't rush it too fast.

"Aw, come on, honey," he said. "Let up a little. Don't tease Fred like that. Don't treat Fred like that."

She said nothing.

"Baby, you know how it is with Fred. He's just got to have what he wants. You know that, baby. When Fred wants something, he just has to have it."

He was working himself up to the point. He knew she was going to make him force her, and he was perfectly satisfied to let it be that way. It had always been that way before. She had never actually given herself to him.

"Give me a kiss, honey. Give Fred a little old kiss."

This time when he pulled her to him, she didn't resist. She let him kiss her, and ran her tongue over his in that old hot way he remembered. Inwardly he smiled.

"That's the way, honey," he cooed. "That the way to treat Fred."

He started working at her, letting his hand slide down the softness of her skirt and the warm flesh underneath, gently working her skirt up above her knees. Slowly, gently. That's the way, he thought. The old touch. Take it easy, but don't let up.

She became perfectly still.

He shifted his position, turning and kissing her on the mouth and face. With one hand he worked the front of her

dress open, cupping the hand over her breast. Little by little he forced her knees apart with the other, thrusting the hand down between her legs. All the while he talked soothingly and cooingly.

Suddenly she pushed him roughly from her. She laughed, derisively, mockingly.

"You fat old drunken slob!" she said, and the ring of cruelty was in her voice.

For a moment he sat there stunned, and there was a sickness in the pit of his stomach. This nineteen-year-old hussy had been playing with him all the time, teasing him, letting him get all worked up, just for the pleasure of denying him. She was tantalizing him, torturing him, just as if he was one of the callow youths on the football team. She was deriving more pleasure out of teasing him—out of denying him the one thing that he wanted—than she would get out of giving herself to him.

He sat very still, feeling the chagrin, the disappointment. He was embarrassed, angered, frustrated.

"You tramp!" he said. "You lousy, heartless tramp!"

She laughed. "You fat old impotent slob. You stink like a whiskey still, and you breathe like an elephant. Why don't you go off in a corner and play with yourself?"

"A man never misses what he's never had," she quoted mockingly. "But when he's had it once and can't get it again—that's when it drives him mad."

"Damn you!" He almost shouted. "I'll have you."

"Poor little baby," she mocked. "Mama won't give you a thing!"

A little of the old Fred Veek asserted itself. "You give it, or I take it," he said. "Either way. It makes no difference to me which way it is."

"You try it," she said. "You try it, you fool, and I'll kill you. I mean it, Fred Veek—I'll kill you!"

He hardly heard her threat. All the anger and frustration welled up in him, and he moved. In one motion he caught her, one arm around her waist and the other at her shoulder.

With brute strength he forced her down along the seat. He grappled with her there, one leg half over her on the seat, the other along the edge of the seat.

She struck out quickly, hitting his face with both hands, trying to drive him from her. But he stubbornly clung to her, wrestling with her. His foot struck the whiskey bottle where it stood on the floor of the car, kicking it over. The bottle made a sharp, clinking sound, but the glass did not break. He held her down on the seat and put his mouth to her face and kissed her roughly. He worked his mouth around over her face, seeking her lips. She turned her head, and his wet lips caressed the lobe of her ear.

"Let me go, you bastard!" she panted.

But he knew she was enjoying it, was getting a sexual satisfaction out of thwarting him. And he realized that she was not going to allow herself to be taken this time, that she was going to fight him all the way and enjoy the fighting.

She scratched and tore at his face with her long fingernails until he was forced to let her up.

"You slob," she said. "You drunken old slob."

He struck her sharply, joltingly.

"I'll kill you!" she cried. "I'll kill you for that!"

He caught her again, pulling her toward him and forcing her downward to the seat of the car. Her arms flailed, her hands struck out, slapping, scratching, punishing him. Her long legs thrashed about, her feet scuffed at the floor of the car, kicking the whiskey bottle again.

Then, suddenly, she was still. He felt her body go lax, become passive. For a moment he just held her, surprised at the suddenness with which her struggling ended. Then he grinned. She was his. She had just struggled more this time, had just made it harder. But she was yielding to Fred Veek; she was giving in to the master. She was his and, by God, she was worth all the tussling he had gone through!

"All right, honey," he said, breathing hard. "Now you're acting like you got some sense. Now you know that when Fred Veek wants something, he gets it."

His hand was at her thigh, tugging at her skirt. He felt her flesh quiver as his hand crept upward, felt her draw in her breath.

Then he made the fatal mistake—he forgot to watch. He was all worked up, and he wanted her badly. She was a young girl, an exciting girl, and he hadn't had her for a long time. The fight had been hard, and he had won. He was all excited, like a schoolboy—like one of the kids from the football squad. He wasn't alert, wasn't watching; he didn't notice that while he was fumbling at her body she was reaching toward the floor of the car where the bottle almost filled with liquor lay.

His first warning came when, with final and terrible force, she shoved him from her. This time she did not try to draw away. She sat loose from him, tense, waiting—eager, he thought, for the struggle to resume.

"You bitch!" he said. "I'll make you beg."

He had reached for her again before he realized that she held the bottle of whiskey in her hand. She struck with all her strength, smashing the pint bottle full on the horse-shoe shaped bald spot as he caught her. He never heard the solid bop of the blow—he heard only the ringing, not even feeling the pain. For the moment he was stunned.

"You bitch!" he said. "You—"

She laughed shortly, hysterically, but somehow there was pleasure in her laughter. She wielded the whiskey bottle up and down, striking furiously, smashing his head and face, never stopping until he slumped silently, heavily, his back against the door, his head lolled to one side.

She dropped the bottle from her hand, onto the floor of the car. She sat in the front seat of the car, all the way against the opposite door from his body, breathing heavily. The curl of her lips there in the darkness was wet and cruel. Now she heard the radio, still playing, and she realized that it had been playing all through the struggle.

She was in the car alone. Alone with a dead man.

She was not frightened. She knew no remorse. She knew

that at the dance couples still moved about on the floor, whispering, clinging to one another, while the silken rustle of many dresses lent magic to the evening. She knew that the football players still held court in a corner of the ball-room, laughing, talking about the game, and telling dirty jokes.

But she was not with them to tell one when her turn came.

She knew that, back at the dance, Duke Bolden stood tall among the football players. Duke Bolden, tall, well-built, with his easy ways and friendly manner. Duke Bolden, the colored boy with the hangdog expression in his eyes. Duke Bolden, the great left end who thought she was an angel. Those were Fred Veek's words—he thinks you're an angel with wings and everything.

Duke Bolden, whom she needed now.

She shut her eyes and thought. She thought a long time.

She opened her eyes at last. Reaching her hand into the glove compartment of the dead man's car, she searched until she found a paper cup. Then she picked up the bottle of whiskey from where she had dropped it on the floor of the car. She tried to pour whiskey into the cup, but her hands trembled too much. She threw the cup away. Raising the bottle to her mouth, she drank, forcing the scotch down her throat until she gagged and the water ran out of her eyes. Then she put the bottle on the seat beside her.

She opened the door and got out of the car. Her mind was made up. She wanted Duke Bolden. She needed him. She knew that the tall colored boy would do anything she wanted him to do.

CHAPTER VI

EDDIE CARBONI came through the door and looked over to where Duke Bolden stood among the football players. His face was dark and brooding, and at the same time there was puzzlement written on his features.

"Hey, Duke," he called. "Come here."

The tall colored boy walked long-legged across the dance floor to where Eddie waited.

"What's up, Eddie?" he asked.

"Alice wants you, Duke. She's outside."

"Aw, quit kidding, Eddie."

"That's straight, Duke. She's waiting for you. Told me to tell you to come out there."

"Thanks, Eddie," he said. There was sudden gladness, sudden hope in his eyes. He moved toward the door.

"I don't know what she wants," Eddie said. "She was standing out there in the dark. She acted sort of—funny."

Duke looked searchingly at the other. Now there was anxiety on his face.

"Well—thanks, Eddie," he repeated.

He went hurriedly through the door.

She was standing away from the light, far into the shadows, and he heard her sobs even before he reached her. He ran the last few steps to her.

"Alice," he said. "What is it, Alice?"

He caught her with both hands.

"What's the matter, Alice? What is it?"

She did not speak. She held her head down, and great sobs came from her. He pulled her to him, put his long, strong arms tight around her. She buried her face in the recess where his neck ran into his shoulder, and he could feel the tremors of her body as she wept. He held her still tighter, wanting desperately to do something.

"Alice. God, Alice, what is it?"

"Duke," she said in a strange voice. "Duke, I—I killed—him."

For a while he said nothing; for a while he didn't understand it. A while back she had been dancing with him. Then she had danced with Fred Week. Later he had seen her leave with Fred Week. Now she was sobbing and saying a lot of things that didn't make sense.

"What are you talking about, Alice?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

Then, amazingly, she was no longer sobbing. She started talking in a rapid, high voice, telling him everything that happened. Her head was no longer on his shoulder and even though his arms were still about her waist there was something about her—some sudden reserve—that seemed to detach her from him. She looked into his face steadily, searchingly, even in the darkness, as she went on with her story, telling how she had been in the car with Fred Veek, how he had tried to force her, how she had beaten him over the head with the whiskey bottle.

"I didn't mean to kill him," she said. "I didn't know I was hitting him that hard. All I wanted to do was make him let me get out of the car."

He said, "Maybe you're mistaken. Maybe he's not dead."

"He's dead," she insisted. "I know he's dead. I could tell by the way he was sitting with his head to one side."

He said, "I'll go out there. I'll see."

"What can you do, Duke?"

"I don't know. I'll know after I see him."

She caught him by the arm, clung to him.

"I'm going with you, Duke."

She half led, half followed him to the car, holding tightly to his arm. Duke was afraid, caught as he was by something more strange and terrible than anything he had ever known. The boundless love that he felt churned within him. He knew that this was his chance, that now was the time to show her how much she meant to him. She had come to him—Duke Bolden—looking for help. Now was the time to prove himself. Now that she needed him.

Yet he was afraid.

No more words were spoken. At the car they stopped, and the silence was still between them. Duke opened the front door and looked at the form on the seat slumped against the opposite door, and he knew that there was nothing he could do for Fred Veek now.

A sudden spasm of sobbing shook Alice.

He said, "Now, Alice."

He gathered her into his strong arms and lifted her bodily. Taking her to the back door, he caught the door handle in his big, long-fingered hand and opened it. He put her into the car, letting her sit in the back seat, then closed the door.

He got into the front of the car and closed the front door, sitting as far from that huddled form as he could. The radio was still playing, now very faintly, and he turned it off. He tried to think.

He could hear Alice sobbing in the back.

He was conscious of that silent, non-breathing form huddled against the left front door.

And now and then, from a long way off, he could hear the whispering sound of music coming faintly—ever so faintly—from the dance. But the dance—and the game before the dance—seemed a thousand years away. The huddled form near him loomed great and ominous and evil, more so in death than Fred Veek had ever been in life.

The racking sobs of the girl he loved tore at him. Now was the time to prove himself. For long minutes he was silent, thinking, not knowing what to do. He must get her out of this; it was his one way to show her how much he loved her. But how could he help her—what could he do?

She spoke from the back seat. "Do you think they'll—they'll send me to prison?"

"No," he said quickly. "They can't. I won't let them. I'll tell them I did it!"

There was a tight silence between them. The words were out. He had said it, had made the promise.

"No," she said slowly. "You can't do it. I won't let you."

"Hush," he said. "Hush, Alice. Let me think."

"But you can't do it, Duke. They'll send you to prison. Why should you do this for me?"

"Because I love you, Alice."

"Oh, Duke!"

The silence between them became deep. In the front seat the still form remained in the gloominess of death, motionless there, with eyes unblinking, while the far music from

the dance hall went unheard. The cold clamminess of death was there like a witness.

At last she reached out across the seat, placing her hand on his shoulder.

"Will you really do it, Duke?"

He waited. He knew what he had said, what he would have to do if he wanted her. But he did not want to do it. Something within him told him that it was too much, that the sacrifice was too great. The future was bright before him. This was his last year in college, and professional football beckoned to him. He was twenty-two; he had made a great name for himself in those few years. In the next few years he could make a still greater name for himself.

But he couldn't do all that and save Alice too. He had to choose—he had to take one or the other. He loved Alice; he wanted her. Still he wanted to stay out of trouble. He wanted to justify all the hope and faith the people back home had put in him during all his high-school and college years. Howard Cannon, the eccentric and rich old man who had spent so much money on his education. All the people, old and young, back at the African Methodist Church who had been so proud when one of "our own" boys was doing so well. Flashes of Sunday mornings touched his memory. Sunday mornings after Saturday games. His name, even then, headlined in sport columns of local papers. Smiles on the faces of Sunday School teachers. "Hello, Duke." "Just fine, Miss Johnson, How're you?" "Hello, young man! How's our football player this morning?" "I feel fine, Reverend Berry. How're you?" "Oh, I'll do. Of course I can't run up and down a football field like you, but I'll do." And the minister would laugh heartily and move on. Young boys not yet in high school pointing him out. "That's Duke Bolden. I saw his picture in the paper this morning." "Yeah. I saw it too." And they looked at him in awe and reverence. Young girls looking at him, saying shyly, "Hello, Duke." And older girls smiling, flirting, angling. The very old men and women putting their hands on him, looking at him fondly. "Fine boy—

that Duke. I'm telling you. Our young folks really coming into their own these days. You go right on, son. Make a name for yourself, and don't never do nothing wrong. Just keep climbing right up to the top. You got a good chance. It wasn't nothing like that when we were young."

Alice spoke again, her words breaking his line of thought.

"Are you going to help me, Duke?" There was urgency in her voice, a shade of concern.

He said nothing.

"Duke," she said, and her voice was slightly trembling.

"Duke, are—are you going to do what you said?"

"I don't know."

She gave a sharp, protesting cry. With a leap she was out of the back door and pulling the front door open. She reached for him, catching at his coat lapel, pulling, urging.

"But you just said so, Duke!" she cried. "You just said you would."

He said nothing. He was scared. He still had time to back out. He could go back to the dance where his friends stood in a corner talking about football. He could go up to his dormitory room and let her do whatever she wished. He could let them arrest her, and he could stay on at University and graduate.

But what would life be like afterward? He loved the girl. He would do almost anything for her. Now she needed him—needed him desperately.

But he was afraid.

He sat there, while she stood with her hand still clasping his coat lapel. The darkness was between them and the darkness was around them and the darkness was deep down inside them.

"Will you do it, Duke? Will you do it for me?"

He got out of the car, the indecision great within him. He held his hands to his sides. "Alice," he said in a shaking voice. "Oh, Alice!"

He reached out and caught her and held her in his strong arms. He buried his face in her hair, pressing his lips hard

against her neck. "Alice," he mumbled. "God, Alice, I wish I knew what to do. I wish that someway, somehow—"

She reached upward to his great height, putting her right arm around his neck. She stood still, letting him embrace her, and he was trembling like a frightened child. The chill November night wind blew, whipping at her hair and blowing the loose strands about his face where it was pillowed against her.

"I need you, Duke," she said softly.

"I don't know!" he cried. "Jesus, Alice—I don't know!"

"You said you love me, Duke."

"I do, Alice. I love you—love you!"

"I believe you, Duke," she said patiently. "I believe what you say. But they're going to send me to prison, Duke. Can you understand that? They're going to send me to prison, and you won't help me. Why, Duke? If you love me, why don't you help me?"

He held tightly to her, saying nothing.

"It's hard on a woman once she goes to prison, Duke. It'd be harder on me. I'm young—I'm only nineteen. I'd come out of prison with a record. Without a diploma—without a chance. What could I do then, Duke? If you love me, why can't you save me from this?"

He tried to answer her, but he couldn't. She put her other arm around his neck, clasping her fingers together and holding her head back to look in his face. He could see her eyes shining in the darkness.

"Duke, if you get me out of this—if you do this one thing for me—I swear by the God that you believe in that you'll never regret it. I'll make it up to you—every bit of it. I'll do anything for you—anything you want me to do."

He stood still, watching her shining eyes.

"Duke," she said, and her voice was a whisper.

"What?"

"I'll—I'll even go to your church—to the African Methodist Church you were talking about tonight. I'll join it—go to your church every Sunday. I'll go to your Sunday

School every Sunday morning. Maybe, after a while, I could even learn how to teach. Do you believe me, Duke?"

"I don't know."

"Believe me. Please believe me! If you do this for me—if you tell the police that you killed him—I'll be yours forever. If they send you to prison I'll go to your town and live in it and wait for you. When I graduate I'll—I'll go to Mr. Cannon where you used to work and get a job in his office somehow. He graduated from University a long time ago, and maybe he'll give me a job if I tell him I came from University. And when you come out, Duke—when they let you go—I'll be waiting for you."

He said nothing. She went on, talking wildly, pleading, promising. Now and then there was a little pause, but when he remained silent she went on.

"I'll get Mr. Cannon to help you, Duke. You worked for him, and he paid your way through college, and he'll help you. I'll make him help you. I'll do it somehow. Just as soon as I graduate. I'll get you out of there just as soon as I graduate. I'll get your church to help. And I'll get your minister to help. What is your minister's name, Duke?"

"Reverend Berry."

"I'll get Reverend Berry to help. And I'll get all the people in your church to help. And when you come out of there I'll be waiting for you. And I'll be yours, Duke. Yours for anything you want."

She still had her arms around him. She pulled his face to hers and put her mouth to his, kissing him fully and hard.

"You're good, Duke," she whispered. "You're good and brave and strong, and you love me. You do love me, don't you? You'll help me, won't you?"

He sighed heavily, and when he spoke there was resignation in his voice. "All right, Alice—" He looked searchingly into her face for a long time, then finished: "I'll do it."

She looked at him closely in the darkness. After a long time she kissed him again, softly. Then she held him away from her.

"Listen, Duke," she said. "All that I told you, I meant it. I'm going to do it. I won't go back on you. And I don't want you to go back on me."

"I won't go back on you."

"All right. Now I'll tell you what you've got to do. You get into the car and drive to the police station. Tell them that you went out to the car to talk to him about—about professional football. Tell them that you apologized for hitting him in the dressing room after the game. Tell them that he said forget it and offered you a drink. You didn't want the drink, but you took it just to be polite. He kept insisting on you taking another. You're not used to drinking, and after a while you got high. Then he—he started calling you names, and you started fighting. You were drunk, and you didn't know what you were doing. You started hitting him with the whiskey bottle, and—and you killed him. You didn't mean to—you were just drunk. That way maybe they won't give you much time."

He didn't say anything.

"Will you do that for me, Duke?"

"Yeah," he said, stonily. He turned to get into the car.

"Wait a minute," she cried. "I almost forgot."

He stopped, and she moved in front of him, reaching inside the car, her fingers groping along the floor of the car. The bottle of whiskey was half under the seat, but she found it.

"Here," she said. "You'll have to take a drink first."

"No," he said sharply. "I don't drink. You know that."

"But you'll have to. They've got to smell whiskey on your breath. You've got to be drunk—you've got to stagger."

"Why?" he demanded. "Why?"

"Oh, Duke—can't you see I'm thinking of you? If you're sober it'll go hard for you—they'll give you too much time. But if you're drunk—if he took you out to his car and tricked you into getting drunk so that maybe he could get even with you for what you did in the dressing room—Don't you see what I'm driving at? Don't you understand?"

"All right," he said. "All right, Alice."

He took the bottle and drank. He sputtered and choked, and water came to his eyes. But he held the bottle to his mouth, swallowing several times. He took the bottle from his mouth.

"Wait a little while," she urged. "You'll have to drink more than that. But wait until that settles a little."

"All right," he said. He didn't care now.

"Now don't forget what you're going to do, Duke. You're going to the police station. Right?"

He nodded.

"And you're going to say just what I told you to."

"Yes, Alice."

"Don't forget. You keep your word, and I'll keep mine. And I'll be waiting for you, Duke. Now you'll have to drink some more."

He drank again, and somehow the whiskey didn't seem to burn so much. She stood close to him, watching each swallow he took. Finally she reached for the bottle.

"All right," she said. "That's enough."

And, smartly, she bent over, raising her skirt and wiping the bottle carefully, erasing prints. Then, holding the bottle with the silk of her skirt between her fingers and the glass, she handed it back to him.

"Put it back," she told him.

He put the bottle on the floor of the car. Then, using all his great strength, he pulled the lifeless form away from the left door over to the right side. She stood watching while he went around to the left side of the car and opened the door and got in.

"Now, don't you forget what I told you, Duke," she said. "I'll be waiting for you."

He said, "I won't forget."

Already the whiskey was taking effect, and it showed in the lack of concern in his voice.

She stood waiting for him to drive off. She saw him fumble

with the ignition key, and she waited for the roar of the motor. Somehow she was anxious to hear that roar.

But what she heard turned her cold with fear. When he pressed the starter the motor turned with a weakness that was sickening.

Oh, God, she thought. Oh, God!

She had forgotten about the radio. It had been playing so long with the car standing still, running down the battery. Now the motor wouldn't start. She stood there digging the fingernails of her right hand into her left palm, wild, helpless rage knifing through her and leaving her weak with anger. She had worked so hard on the colored boy. Now the battery was run down, and the motor wouldn't start.

She heard the slow grind of the starter again, still weak. She closed her eyes and cursed. It wouldn't start. Fred Week's damned car.

Again the grind came. And then, with a suddenness that frightened her, she heard the powerful roar of the motor. She stood there, motionless, until the colored boy turned the car around and drove out of the parking lot into the street.

She knew that Duke might not get all the way to the police station. He had drunk too much. But that made no difference. If he had an accident it would be just as well.

She had no fear now. She knew what he would do—she knew and understood him thoroughly. She understood his eyes—they were a dog's eyes when they looked at her. He had never looked at her the way Fred Week looked at her—the way Duke looked at her was like worship itself. The thought of this stirred up all the cruelty in her nature—a big, strong boy like Duke, with all the limelight, all the fame. Putty in her hands. And he was nice looking in an athletic sort of way—definitely nice looking. The cruelty surged through her as she stood there in the parking lot.

Nice looking. A nice-looking colored boy. A colored boy who worshiped her so much that he was going to jail for her. She went slowly toward the faint sound of music which came from the dance hall. There was no sense of guilt, no regret,

no concern for the colored boy. She had been in a bad spot, and she had got out of it. Fred Veek had tried to master her, and she had killed him. That was all. She would kill any man who tried to master her.

CHAPTER VII

THERE WERE the street lights bright in the night. There was the little white line running down the middle of the street, and there were all the cars on each side of the white line. Some of the cars were coming after him, some were passing him, and some were following him. But the white line wouldn't stay in the same place, and the curbing seemed to be crooked. Now and then he was over near the curbing, then he was over across the white line on the wrong side of the street. It had never been that hard for him to drive before.

Horns kept blowing. There was the frequent screech of tires and curses as drivers leaned out of car windows angrily. He wondered what they were so angry about. The curses seemed to come to him from too far off to make any sense. And the sound of horns and the screeching brakes seemed to be just sounds that he heard in a dream.

All the same, he wished the street was a little straighter. He had to get to the police station. But he was too drunk to go to the police station. He couldn't make it all the way.

He rolled the window down and leaned his head out a minute as he drove. The November coldness slapped him in the face like ice water, and he came instantly out of the fog. He was weaving down the street, making cars swerve away from him or brake suddenly. He realized that all the horn blasts and the curses were for him. He was driving drunkenly down the street, and on the car seat beside him was a dead man. He was going to the police station to tell them that he had killed the man.

The traffic was getting heavier all the time. He couldn't drive in this traffic.

He pulled over to the curb and parked. For a moment he sat there, trying to think, letting the cold air come in to him through the open window of the car. He wasn't going to the police station. Definitely not. He would be a fool to do anything like that. There had to be another way. He sat there in the car, and the traffic swam past him, and he watched the people go in and out of the diner on the side of the street where he was parked. He sat there, and the dead man sat there with him. The air coming in on him was like a cold shower after a game. It felt good.

The idea came to him as he sat there. It didn't come all at once, but little by little as he watched the people go in and out of the diner. He didn't have to tell them that he did it. He didn't have to go to the police station to save Alice. He could drive the car around to some alley and leave it, with the body inside. He could wipe all the finger prints off the car. That was all. They would never connect him or Alice to it. He would go through Fred Veek's pockets—make it look like robbery. He would be safe and Alice would be safe. Both of them would graduate from University. And after that. . .

Only he was too drunk to drive. He was lucky that a traffic cop hadn't stopped him already. He had to get sober. He had to get sober quick. He watched the people going in and out of the diner. Then, suddenly, he knew how to get sober. He got out of the car and locked all the doors, leaving the dead man alone in the car.

There was a table in the corner of the diner, and he sat down there, hoping no one would recognize him. He could never tell when someone would see him and say, "Isn't that Duke Bolden, the football player?" Then they would crowd around him, start asking him about the game. He didn't want that.

A girl in a waitress uniform came over to his table, and he told her that he wanted orange juice and black coffee. She was in her early twenties, and she hardly looked at him as she wrote down what he told her.

"Just orange juice and black coffee?" she asked. "No eggs or pastry or anything?"

She went away, and he sat there thinking about the best place to leave the car. It had to be a long way from that campus. That was about all that was important. Except that it would have to be in some alley, where a man could be robbed without attracting too much attention.

The girl brought the orange juice and black coffee back.

"You sure that's all you want?" she asked.

"I want more black coffee when I finish this," he told her.

She looked at him then, hard. He wished he hadn't told her he wanted more coffee. He was colored, and it must seem strange to her that he should wander into a diner in that part of town and do nothing but drink black coffee.

"You see," he said quickly, "I was to a dance, and one of the fellows had a bottle, and—and I'm not used to drinking." He paused, seeing how she was looking at him. "I can't go home drunk," he said lamely. "Somebody told me that if I drank enough black coffee—"

She smiled suddenly. "Oh," she said. "So that's it. Well, you just drink all the coffee you want. I don't know how sober it'll make you."

After that she watched his table. Whenever he finished one cup of coffee, she brought him another. Soon he was feeling better. People kept coming into the diner, and everybody was pretty busy. He watched how the waitress hurried about, taking orders, shouting them to the short-order man, drawing coffee. But she never let his cup stay empty.

She was pretty good, he thought.

When he felt sober enough he stood up to go, leaving the girl a pretty good tip.

She said, "I hope you get home all right. And you'd better start drinking punch when you go to dances."

"I will," he promised. "And thanks."

She smiled then. "It's all in a night's work."

He paid the check at the cashier's booth and went out into the street. He didn't feel so bad any more.

He unlocked the door on the driver's side and got into the car. Everything was working out all right. Soon it would be over. He would be back at University. In the morning somebody would find Fred Veek's body in the car, but he would be safe. Alice would realize that she had planned everything all wrong, that his was the best way out after all.

He pressed on the starter button, and the buzz was so faint that he could hardly hear it. Then he saw that he had left the car parked with the lights on. He snapped them off quickly. The battery had been weak enough when he started the car in the parking lot. Now it was gone.

He pressed the starter button again. This time there was only a click.

Horror washed through him, draining him of all reason. He wanted to get out of the car and run. Then he forced himself to be calm. There must be a way out of this. Maybe he could just slip out of the car, leave it there.

But no. The waitress in the restaurant. The police would ask questions. Most certainly they would talk to everybody who worked in the diner. He was colored, and colored people probably never went into the diner at that time of night. She would remember him immediately. After that, how long would it take the police to find him? He had to get the car away from there. But how? He couldn't let the car roll downhill, for there was no slope to the street. It lay as level as a mason's wall.

If he was only out in the street he could get a motorist to give him a shove. But he was in close at the curb. Maybe, if he paid a taxi driver to push him. . . .

Then he saw the young, thin-faced patrolman coming across the street, and he had to fight down the panic that caught him. The officer walked straight over to where he sat in the car. He put his hand on the top of the car door and looked at Duke.

"Don't you know you're parked at a bus stop?" he asked.

"I didn't mean to," Duke said. "I was just going out."

"All right, buddy," the officer said. "Get going!"

Duke sat still. What to say now, he thought. How could he get out of it?

"Come on," the officer said. "Get that car out of here before I give you a ticket."

"I can't," Duke told him.

"What th' hell do you mean—you can't?"

"The battery's down. The car won't start."

Immediately the officer became alert, suspicious. He took his hand off the car door and let it hover near his gun. "Let's see you try that starter, boy," he said very softly.

Duke pressed the starter button again. There was nothing but the click.

"It's down," he told the officer. "I left the lights on when I went into the diner."

"Then get out and push the car," the officer said sternly. "I ought to give you a ticket anyway."

Duke got out quickly. If only he could keep the patrolman from looking at the thing in the seat on the other side. If only he could get the car back from the bus station. Then maybe, somehow. . .

"Tell your buddy to get out too," the officer said. "You can't push the thing alone."

"I can push it," Duke said quickly.

"What th' hell's the matter with him—drunk or something?"

He played his flashlight through the window, letting the beam shine on Fred Veek's battered head.

"Jesus Christ!" he said.

He caught at his gun swiftly, pulled it free of its holster. When he spoke his voice was low and deadly.

"You turn around, boy. Turn around slow and put your hands behind you. And if you try anything I'll blow your brains out!"

Duke turned around and put his hands behind him.

"All right," he said wearily. "I won't start anything."

CHAPTER VIII

THEY DIDN'T TAKE Duke Bolden to trial at once. They couldn't quite make up their minds about him. Here was a kid who had come up straight, who had every opportunity, who had everything to look forward to. Certainly he was colored, but he had been denied nothing because of the fact. Certainly his mother and father were dead, but Howard Cannon had seen to it that the boy lacked nothing, and the African Methodist Church had instilled in him all the high standards of Christian living. He had led a clean, upright, honest life since childhood. A hard worker, steady church-goer, good student, and outstanding athlete. In all his twenty-two years there had been no escapades, no scrapes.

Yet he had killed a man. He had confessed the deed without any show of emotion, had told the police everything without coercion or any threat of brutality. He had been drunk, and they had argued. After a while they had started fighting in the car. He hadn't meant to kill, but he was drunk and hardly knew what he was doing. That was all.

They asked questions, all kinds of questions, about Duke's personal life.

"Now, Duke, we want to help you. But first you've got to tell us some things."

"All right."

"That night, Duke—that was the first time you ever had a drink?"

He nodded.

"This Fred Veek, you ever have a fight with him before?"

"No. Not until after the football game."

"Did you ever want to fight him before?"

"I don't know."

"What made you fight him that time?"

"I don't know. He'd been riding me for a long time, and I just got tired of it."

They went on and on. Did he ever want to fight on a football field? Back in high school did he ever get in any jams with girls? Did he have a girl at University? Did he like Sunday School and church? Did he believe in God—really believe—or did he just go to church because he had been taught to do so? This girl, Rida Malloy—didn't he take her to dances and movies? Were they sweethearts? Did they plan to get married when he finished college? Had there ever been any sexual relationship between him and Rida Malloy?

It was at that point that Duke flared.

"You leave her out of this!" he shouted. "You keep her name out of your filthy mouth."

"Now, don't get excited, Duke. We're trying to help you."

"But you leave Rida out of this. She's a good girl—she didn't have anything to do with it. I killed him. I was drunk and we were fighting and I killed him. That's all there is to it!"

"Look, Duke, if you're going to act like that, we can't help you very much. You've got to answer our questions."

"I don't have to answer them. I killed him, that's all."

After that he refused to talk with them.

And when Eddie Carboni came to see Duke, he also got nowhere.

"There's something screwy, Duke," he said. "I know there is."

Duke Bolden sat silent, his eyes flat and hard.

Eddie persisted. "You can't fool me, boy. You're hiding something." Back in the now-dimming recesses of his memory, Eddie Carboni remembered Alice Caldwell, remembered how she had stood there, that night at the dance, holding her hands, her face white, her lips set so stiff to keep from trembling. And he remembered how she acted—funny, was the word he had used later—how she said she *had* to see Duke, *had* to. Her voice thin and strained, just short of breaking.

"Don't protect her," Eddie said. "She's not worth it."

Duke flared. "Shut up," he said, fiercely. "Shut up and

get the hell out of here. If you say a word to anybody I'll kill you. I swear I will."

And Eddie Carboni, puzzled and hurt, left the colored boy, wondering whether he had guessed wrong.

After that Duke Bolden refused to talk with anyone.

The people in the African Methodist Church wanted to help Duke, but there was little they could do. All the people, old and young, who had once been so proud of "our boy," read the papers and hardly believed what they read. It couldn't happen, they said. Duke Bolden wouldn't kill a man. There was heartbreak in the Sunday School department. Now the teachers talked to their students in their classes, telling them about right and wrong, the way they taught Duke Bolden when he was a kid. And they wondered where they had failed the boy. Disappointment and sorrow ran deep around the African Methodist Church.

Howard Cannon was bitterly disappointed in Duke Bolden. He was a big man, standing six feet tall, and had left sixty years behind him. His hair was white and close-cropped, his face was flushed and bloated by many years of hard drinking. At first glance he might well have been taken for a bulky old man with an inherited construction corporation and too much whiskey and money mixed up together—an old bachelor who nursed a whiskey bottle when most men would have been looking for a woman. They would have been partly right. The Cannon Construction Company had been handed down to Howard Cannon from his ancestors. On all of its jobs the sign read: THE CANNON CONSTRUCTION COMPANY. OFFICES IN ALL PRINCIPAL CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES. The sign was true, and the corporation was worth millions. It was a well set-up, well-oiled machine; Howard Cannon could go on week-long drunks, as he often did, and the construction business would go on as usual.

Yet there was something about Howard Cannon that was like gun steel. He hired good, faithful men, all of them, from the construction laborers on his many jobs to the engineers,

architects, and estimators. He was sober when soberness was needed; he was hard when he had to be; and, when he had to crack down on anyone, he was merciless. His political influence was statewide, and he knew his way around Washington.

When Duke got into trouble, Cannon went to see the prosecuting attorney, whose name was Brent.

"What are you going to do with that boy?" he asked.

"What can I do? He killed a man, didn't he?"

"The boy made a mistake, Brent," he said evenly. "The only difference was that his was a little bigger than most."

"I know, Mr. Cannon. But you know how the law is."

"Sure—I know the law. And I know that boy. He killed a punk that had been riding him for three years. For three years that bastard had been riding the boy, and he never said a word to me about it. He just worked for me every summer and played football in the fall. And whenever I asked him how things were going he said everything was all right."

"He murdered a man, Mr. Cannon. I've got to prosecute."

"Well, goddam it, do you have to give him the works, or can you go easy on him?"

"He's never been into any trouble before, Mr. Cannon. He was a pretty good kid before this happened. Everybody feels sorry for him, and the coach did make him drunk."

"So what're you going to do about it?"

"The law says I've got to prosecute."

"The man that made that law didn't know Duke Bolden, else he would've written it different."

"It's a law, and it's a good law. It was made for all of us—not for just one man."

Howard Cannon stood up, and all of his bulk loomed over the prosecutor. "Brent," he said, "I want you to go easy on that boy."

The prosecutor stood up also. "If he'd plead *non vult* to

the charge," he said, "I could talk to the Judge. That's about the only way I could work it."

Howard Cannon frowned, and for a moment some of the steel showed in his face and eyes.

"I don't give a damn how you work it, Brent. I'm not asking you to let the boy go free—he deserves some kind of punishment. I'm not asking you any favors, either. I'm just asking you to do what's right. Duke Bolden's all right, and nobody knows that better than I do. I've practically raised that boy ever since his father was killed on my job. Maybe he did kill that punk of a football coach, but he's no murderer. And I don't want him to be treated like one."

The prosecutor shifted. "I'll tell you what, Mr. Cannon. Maybe we can make it a manslaughter charge. That'll get him from two to ten years. In two or three years he could go before the parole board, and if he behaves himself he can get out then. How's that?"

"You do it any way you want to, Brent. Just don't keep that boy in prison long enough to harm him."

It ended that way. Duke Bolden got two to ten years for manslaughter, and he went to prison, never once mentioning Alice Caldwell's name. Never once did he throw the least suspicion upon the girl he loved.

He went to prison without once seeing her. He was still in prison when she graduated from University.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE WAY HOME from work she stopped at the candy store and bought the evening paper. It was a habit of hers. Always when she neared the apartment house where she lived she went into the candy store where the owner, Mr. Stubbs, had one saved for her. When she entered the store he was at the magazine rack. She went to the counter and waited patiently until he looked up and saw her. He was an old man with tired, watery eyes.

"Good evening," he said, smiling.

She nodded, saying nothing. He went behind the counter and pulled her paper from a stack that he saved for his special customers.

"Here you are, Miss Caldwell."

She allowed a faint, half-bitter smile to touch her lips as she paid him. Three months before she had graduated from University, and her first thought had been to put distance between her and all the things that she dreaded. She had come here. But already she was restless. Every morning she went to work. At lunch time she had the same sandwich and coffee in the same place. At five she put on her coat, said goodnight, and walked slowly along the many blocks to the apartment which she now called home, ignoring the buses, not seeing the crowds on the streets or the heavy streams of traffic. And already she felt stuck, as if she was in a rut, as if the weak-eyed old man had been saying, "Here you are, Miss Caldwell," for years.

She turned and walked out of the store.

The man with the pulpy lips was standing outside the store again. He had been around for two or three weeks now, and he had a way of annoying her. Not that he said anything; he just stared at her as if he could see through what she wore, could see her breasts and legs and body. He had a way of smiling at her—a way that angered her. He was a big man, bulky and strong-looking, perhaps somewhere in his late thirties, and there was something about him that reminded her of a November night which she was trying to forget.

A night and a place a long way from where she was now.

The smile was still on the bulky man's lips, and his greedy, insinuating eyes enraged her. The dirty, disgusting beast dressed in men's clothing, she thought.

The man stepped directly in front of her, his overlarge lips breaking into a wider, welcoming smile. "Why, hello, Mary," he said.

Her eyes knifed through him in contempt as she stopped, refusing to move around him. He stood there blocking her

way, his eyes going over her as if he was remembering her from some other place.

"Don't I know you?" he asked. "Isn't your name Mary?"

"No," she answered coldly.

"I thought I knew you." His eyes were running up and down her body. "I thought you were a girl I knew named Mary."

"I don't know any Mary."

"I could've sworn I met you—let's see—I think it was last winter. It was in Nicks."

"I wasn't here last winter. I'm a stranger here, and I was never in Nicks—wherever that is. Will you please get out of my way so I can go home?"

He moved to one side, and she walked away from him. The big, dirty slob! He had no right to annoy her—had no right to remind her of that other— She curled her fingers into her palm, making a fist, wanting to strike him, to smash his pulpy lips and see them burst like overripe fruit. In her anger she walked faster, knowing that he was watching her. But even in anger she had that something about her—the hips, the long legs, the flowing motions of her body.

She turned the corner into a street of red-brick apartment buildings. She entered one of these, went up one flight, and unlocked the door to her apartment. It was just a place—a living room, bedroom, kitchen, and bath. Just enough furniture to get by on. Even that furniture was rented. Although she did not admit it, even to herself, she knew what she was. A woman in flight, settling like a bird for a little time, but she knew she would move on again.

She went into the bedroom, her mind snapping angrily at the bulky man who kept getting in her way, leering at her, smiling with his big face and heavy lips. For a moment she stood before the mirror, looking at the deep eyes, the long, angular face bordered by dark, brownish hair which fell to her shoulders. Her lips were pressed tightly together, and cruel; but a slight twitching at one corner of her mouth re-

vealed her nervousness and anger. She turned away from the mirror.

She sat on the bed, taking off her shoes and peeling the stockings from her long, well-shaped legs, tossing the stockings over the back of a chair. Standing, she slipped off her blouse and skirt and slip, keeping on her bra and panties. She had a beautiful tall body which more than made up for the plainness of her elongated face. Again she studied herself in the mirror. Now and then she smiled, letting different expressions play on her face, noting those most becoming to her. She turned away and went back to the bed.

Now as she lay on the bed in her bra and panties a flood of thoughts washed over her. More and more she thought of the bulky man who had blocked her path outside the candy store, and she knew she was being drawn slowly, relentlessly into her old ways. She had behaved herself after Duke went to prison. She had studied hard, for the first time in her life, and she had stopped flaunting herself at the college boys. The harder she applied herself to studies, the less time she had to think about the colored boy and the dog-like worshiping eyes with which he had watched her.

During all the rest of her time in school, and during the three months after she graduated, she had not written him once. She told herself that it was because she didn't want anyone to connect the two of them together in the events of that tragic night, but she knew she was lying to herself. She was trying to escape from him, to divorce her mind from any thought of the colored boy.

This she could not do. At night she saw his face and eyes before her. Sometimes hot waves of shame gushed over her, and she was nauseated at the coldblooded way in which she had ruined Duke Bolden's life. Duke who was clean and friendly and strong.

She tried to think how he would feel about prison. When he got out of prison, what would he do? Would he come searching for her, trailing her, as the white girl who had be-

trayed him, caused him to go to prison? Would he be warped by prison, wild-eyed with madness boiling inside him?

She did not know the answer to any of these questions. She was away from it all—rid of him. There was no way he could find her, no way he could follow her.

Getting up from the bed, she walked into the kitchen without even putting on bedroom slippers. She wanted something to drink—had to have a drink. Without a drink she could not sleep.

She took the fifth of whiskey from a shelf and carried it to the table. She thought for a moment that perhaps she should put the bottle back on the shelf and go back to bed, only it seemed foolish to lie there and try to sleep when she knew she couldn't. She couldn't even read the evening paper that she had bought.

She tilted the bottle and watched the whiskey splash into the glass. Her hand shook just a little. She got the ice cubes and dropped them into the glass until the liquid rose to the brim of the glass. She settled herself back in a chair and lifted the glass to her lips.

Punishment, she thought. She had never been a religious person; she had never before been bothered about conscience. A long time ago, when she was a little girl, she had gone to church. Sometimes. She knew about Moses and Job and David and all the others. She knew about Delilah and Jezebel and two sisters who made their father drunk. She knew how they made him drunk on wine that they might lay with him.

She knew also of Jacob and Rachel; she knew that Jacob had worked seven long years for a beautiful, well-favored girl named Rachel. The way Duke, the colored boy, was serving two to ten years for her. But when Duke came out of prison—when he served his sentence—she would not be there.

There was a strange likeness, she thought, to the two stories. Both served time, both were tricked.

But what about her? What about the right and wrong of

the thing? Was it right for the colored boy to give up his name, his freedom—his everything—only to be betrayed? When Jacob finished his seven years they had not given Rachel to him. Now when the colored boy served his sentence, she would not be there waiting for him as she promised.

She poured more whiskey, spilling some of it now. She no longer bothered about the ice cubes.

She was running; she was a bird in flight. She knew what she was running from, but she did not know to what she was running. She knew she was wrong in running, and she knew that wrong would not go unpunished.

After a long time she got up and went toward the bedroom, staggering slightly in her bare feet and bra and panties. Duke Bolden. The colored boy. Then, somehow, in her stage of intoxication, she realized that he was not colored, that nobody was colored. The same way that nobody was white. It was all in the mind. Duke Bolden was an individual, the same as herself.

She made her way, lurchingly, to the bed, a tall white girl with a face which could be either attractive or plain, depending upon moods and expressions. Tall and white, with a perfect body.

She reached the bed and fell across it, drawing her long legs up jack-knife fashion, flinging the lower part of her body onto the bed.

She fell asleep, but somewhere in her dream she saw the colored boy with the tall, athletic body and the tender, dog's eyes.

CHAPTER X

WHEN SHE AWOKE it was black dark, but she knew it was too early to retire for the night. She could tell by the drone of automobile motors and by the slithering sound of automobile tires on the street outside. She also knew that the

tires hissed that way only when it was raining and the streets were wet.

She got up, yawning, the sour whiskey taste in her mouth, and she realized that she had eaten nothing since lunch. That was bad. She sat up on the side of the bed, this time putting on her bedroom slippers. Standing, she pulled off her bra and panties; she yawned, stretching her arms outward and above her head, naked there in the bedroom. Then she sat on the bed again, propping her elbows on her naked thighs, holding her chin in the palm of her hands. She sat that way for a long time, forcing her mind blank, not allowing her mind to dwell upon anything.

At last she looked at the clock. It was a little after ten. Just ten o'clock, and nothing to do.

Restlessness was with her again. There was a yearning in her now—a yearning which came to her again and again, which she managed to stifle, but which always came back stronger than the time before. She was alone and lonesome in a strange town. Not just the ordinary, man-hungry loneliness, but the loneliness of a woman fleeing from something in the past.

When she got up from the bed at last, she put on a robe and went into the bedroom. She washed away all the sour taste with toothbrush and paste.

She bathed, using hot water and scented soaps and bath salts. She rubbed the skin of her body until it glowed pink. Three times she changed water, making it colder each time.

Back in her room she dressed in a white dress, leaving her long legs bare, so that the smooth perfection of them could be seen. Her hair was combed to a clean shininess; she powdered her face and applied lipstick until there was something attractive about her plain features. She looked cool and clean and efficient, the way secretaries should look, and there was something about her now which would make men look at her and want her.

She left the apartment, taking an umbrella with her, but when she reached the street she found that it had stopped

raining: She walked to the corner and turned, carrying the umbrella in her hand.

When she reached the candy store he was there, big and florid in his dark suit and slouch hat, looking something like Fred Veek and something like her father, but more sinister than either of them. She fixed her eyes on a point somewhere in the next block and walked on past him, knowing that he was seeing her breasts and hips and long, bare legs. She let her body flow with suggestiveness as she walked.

She walked down the street slowly, knowing that he was following her, never looking back, swinging her long legs, letting her body flow. It was late summer. There was a faint breeze, and the threat of more rain was in the air. Inside she was hot and excited. Her body tingled with that strange loneliness. She turned off the bright streets into darker ones, knowing that the white dress was conspicuous, that the big man would have no trouble following her.

She went through poorly lighted streets, and men lounged on corners, smirking at her. Some of them whistled at her.

She passed stores with murky lights. The big man followed her. She went on into streets which grew darker and darker, past saloons, past dirty restaurants and storefronts where Gypsies sat in the windows. There were two or three storefronts used as churches, where hymns were being sung. She walked slowly all the way, flaunting her body, knowing that he was following her all the way.

Saloons became more frequent, and the signs of poverty were abundant. The place she went into was on the border between the last respectable places and the places frequented by riffraff. The bar was mahogany, the booths had red leather with chromium trimming. She went in and sat down on the bar stool and ordered a drink. The man behind the bar had on a white coat and black bow tie, and he made a show of polishing glasses before he served her.

He came in and sat down two stools away from her, ordering his drink. She crossed her bare legs and looked at her watch and sipped the drink. She looked down the bar to

where he was sitting. She took a pack of cigarettes out of her handbag, selected one, and put it into her mouth. She went through the business of looking for matches. He struck a match and held it for her. She lighted the cigarette, flicked him a glance, then went back to her drink.

He spoke. "I could have sworn your name was Mary."

She smiled. "That's a stall," she said. "You stand on any corner and call every girl who passes Mary. One out of every ten will be named Mary."

He grinned at her and said, "You're smart."

She shook her head. "It doesn't take much to figure you out."

He grinned at her, his heavy lips drawing back from his teeth. "Smart and nice," he said.

She laughed softly.

"What's funny?" he asked, scowling.

"Nothing."

"But you laughed."

"So I laughed," she said. "So what?"

He did not take her up on that. Instead he motioned to the bartender.

"Give her another drink."

She let her voice go hard. "I can buy my own drinks."

The bartender looked from her to him, not moving.

"No harm," he said. "Just trying to be friendly. I've been trying to get a chance to buy you a drink ever since I first saw you."

"I don't even know you."

"I'm Dan."

"Is that all the name you got?"

"That's enough."

She didn't say anything to that. The bartender still stood there looking at them. She drained her glass. When she put it down the curling smile was on her lips.

"Ready for the drink?" he asked.

"Who said I wanted another?"

"Your glass is empty. Ladies ought not to sit at a bar with empty glasses before them."

She said, "You can buy me a drink, but that's not saying I'm a lady."

He got off his stool and moved to the one next to her.

"Do I still call you Mary?" he asked, "or would you like me to call you by your right name?"

"Alice," she said.

"Alice who?"

"You won't know me well enough to call me anything else," she said. "Let's leave it at Dan and Alice."

"All right."

The bartender brought the drink to her. She looked at it for a minute without touching it.

"I'm sorry about the way I tried to pick you up today," he said. "I'm just lonely and wanted to talk to somebody like you."

She eyed him steadily, now cool and sure of herself. "What are you doing lonely?" she asked. "There're plenty women in this town, aren't there?"

"I've just been here a little over a month," he told her. "Besides, I'm choicy about women."

"Is that a compliment?"

"I meant it to be."

"What do you do beside hang out in front of the candy store?"

"I gamble," he said. "Horses and cards. I go from town to town. As soon as people get to know me too well, I move on."

Yes, she thought. That fits him. Always on the go, always plotting, scheming, taking chances. She looked at his hands. They were big and soft, with short, stubby fingers. She knew how they would flash over a deck of cards, knew the short, jerky movements with which he would deal, knew that no eye could see everything he did with cards. He fitted a pattern, the same way Fred Veek did. They were the same. One

was a gambler, and the other had been a football coach. But there was no difference between the two.

She looked straight at him and said, "You're looking for a girl to take up with, aren't you. You want a nice girl who is easy to pick up and easy to put down, don't you?"

The pulpy lips parted in a grin. "You got me figured out just about right, honey."

"There are plenty of girls," she said. "But that kind just don't exist."

"I think you could be like that. God knows you're nice. And you're not the kind to take things too seriously. I can tell."

She began to get angry then. Her eyes clouded, and the twitching started at the corner of her mouth again. She sipped her drink in silence.

"There's no need to get sore about what I said," he told her. "You're a swell-looking girl, and you're educated. I can tell by looking at you. You do what you want to do, and you don't give a damn what anybody else thinks about it. A girl like you ought not to be walking around alone all the time. It's not right. You ought to be riding around in somebody's fine car; you ought to be going to swell shows and night clubs. You're class, honey."

She turned her face to hide the smile. He was so much like Fred Veek had been. Those were his kind of words. That was his approach.

She looked at him, the smile gone from her face. "And you think I'm just waiting for you to invite me into your car, don't you? You think I'd be willing to let you use me any kind of way so long as you took me to shows and night clubs. You think you could use me until you got tired of me, then you could discard me the way you'd throw away a wad of gum when you got tired of chewing on it, don't you?"

He shrugged. "I'm a roaming man, baby. I don't stay put long."

She laughed then. "I won't be your playmate—not even if

you would stay put. I'm not looking for a man. And I've got to be going home. Thanks for the drink."

"Maybe I could give you a lift," he suggested.

"Do you have a car?"

"No, but there're plenty taxis in the streets."

She drained her glass, and then she stood up, picking up her umbrella. The smile was on her face, and her eyes were deep again. She looked at him.

"You can if you want to," she said.

"That's fine, honey. I want to."

They went outside, and the night was warm. They walked along the sidewalk until a taxi came by. He hailed the taxi. They got in, and she sat with the umbrella in her hand.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Home," she said. "I told you I was going home."

"But it's early. I thought you might like to take in a floor show or something."

"I'm going home," she said flatly.

"Okay," he said. He spoke to the driver, and the taxi slid out into the traffic.

He moved closer to her, and she sat still, looking at the back of the driver's head. She felt him put his hand on her knee, but she did not move. She felt his hand start sliding upward. She put her hand on his and held it where it was.

"Be still," she said in a husky voice. "Be still—Dan."

"You're class, baby," he said. "You're real class."

She sighed.

"You sure you don't want another drink?"

"No. Even if I did I've got whiskey home."

"Do you live alone?"

"Yes."

"That's nice. Very nice."

"I mean what I say. I live alone. No one-night stands."

"Okay, honey. I give you credit."

She hummed a tune to herself, and the taxi slid on through the night. He held his hand there on her thigh, but she wouldn't let him move it any farther. The driver turned the

corner and was at the apartment building where she lived. He cut off the meter and looked at them.

His hand was still on her thigh. "About that drink," he said.

"What about it?"

"I need one. I wouldn't mind having one in your place."

"I don't know you that well, Dan."

"Okay," he said. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Dan." But she didn't get out of the taxi. She just sat there, and the night was all around them. He pressed his hand harder on her thigh.

"I'm working," the taxi driver said. "I've got a living to make, and the meter's off."

She didn't move. She looked at the big fellow, and her eyes were deep, and the corner of her mouth twitched.

"Are you sure you just want a drink?" she asked.

"That's all I want."

"Fine," she said. "We may as well understand each other now. That's all you'll get. I'm not giving out anything else."

"Okay," he said. Then he repeated, as if to himself, "Okay."

He paid the driver. They got out of the taxi and went up to her apartment.

Once inside he lighted a cigarette and sat on the divan, relaxed. She took the umbrella into the bedroom, returned with an ash tray.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"Later," she said. "I'll make the drinks."

She went into the kitchen and got the glasses and bottle, bringing them and the ice back into the living room. She walked back and forth, conscious that his eyes were on her.

She turned on the radio. "Do you like music?" she asked.

"I can take it or leave it."

She smiled as she spun the dial. The music came suddenly from the radio, a thick male voice shouting, "Lemme go ho-o-ome, whiskey. Lemme walk outa that door. Lemme go ho-o-ome, whiskey—"

"You like it?" she asked.

He shrugged. "Some noise."

"But I like it," she told him. "I think it's cute."

He said, "You're cute."

She poured the drinks, and they sat on the divan and listened to the radio. She watched him. If he wasn't so big, she decided, he might have been good looking. If he was thinner, like Duke Bolden. . . .

"I've got some records," she said. "If you'd like to hear them—"

"This is all right."

She stood and poured another drink, then sat down and smoothed her white dress. She let her legs stretch out in front of her. His face was working now. He licked his pulpy lips once, and she smiled. She knew she was going to enjoy torturing him, the way she had tortured men before that fatal night. It had been a long time now since she had tried it.

When he slid over to her side of the divan she did not move. He put his hands over her shoulders, pulling her to him. He leaned forward, but she pretended not to see his lips coming toward hers. She turned her head slightly. He caught her face in his big hands, his short, stubby fingers along her sunken cheeks. But when his hands reached downward, searching her body, she said, "Don't do that, Dan."

But he laughed and stood up, picking her up bodily and carrying her to the bedroom. He was strong, and she did not struggle. He placed her across the bed, sitting down beside her. "Baby," he said. "Baby. baby!" He leaned over to kiss her, and she let him. Again his hand was moving over her body, searching.

She gripped her fingers tightly into her palms, making a fist. She struck him hard across the mouth, feeling the impact, and he yelped with pain. She got the satisfaction of seeing blood spurt from his lips. Like red juice coming out of rotten fruit, she thought. Overcome with wild, savage elation, she whipped her fist back and forth, beating at his face, giving everything she had to each backhand blow.

It all happened in an instant before he leaped to his feet and stood clear of her. He stood there, his lips bleeding, his mouth open, incredulity and astonishment on his face. Then the fury worked its way onto his face.

"Bitch!" he said. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

She got up off the bed, watching him. She moved to where her umbrella stood beside the dresser, picked it up. She smiled, and cold pleasure washed over her face.

"I told you you weren't getting anything but whiskey," she said. "I told you, and you wouldn't believe me."

His pulpy, bloody lips drew back in a sneer. "Bitch," he said. "You she-cat. I'm going to beat the living hell out of you!"

She raised the umbrella as he started for her, holding the pointed end toward him.

"Slob," she hissed. "You dirty slob. You take another step toward me and I'll stick this all the way through that big gut of yours!"

He heard the hardness and savageness ringing in her voice, and he saw her twisted face. He must have read something of her determination, must have guessed that she would enjoy hurting him. He stopped.

"I'll get you," he said softly. "I'll get you for this. Tomorrow—the next day—some day. I'll catch you and beat hell out of you."

She hissed out a shockingly profane epithet.

"I killed one man," she said, her voice husky with venom. "I killed one man, and he was a big slob like you."

He heard and he believed, and there was sudden fear in his eyes.

"I'll kill you the same way I killed him, you hear? I'll kill you, bastard!"

He put his hand to his mouth and pressed, then looked at the blood. He took a step backward.

"Now, get!" she said. "Get out of here. Get the hell out, and when you see me on the street again, don't speak to me."

He backed out of the bedroom. She followed him. He

backed all the way to the front door, his eyes on the girl in the white dress with the umbrella held before her. He reached his hand behind him, found the doorknob, opened the door. He backed out of the door and slammed it shut.

She went to the door and shot the bolt. Then she stood there, listening to his retreating steps, her lips still twisted into that cruel smile.

The next morning she packed. She put everything she owned into the suitcases and bags that she had used so many times at University. All the while she thought of the night before, knowing that she would have killed the man if she had had any suitable kind of instrument. She almost wished she had killed him. She would have got joy out of the killing.

When she was sure that she had everything belonging to her she carried her luggage out of the apartment and down the stairs and out into the street. She was leaving for good. The furniture wasn't hers, and she had been paid the day before. Everything that she owned was in the suitcases and the overnight bag.

A taxi cruised by, and she hailed it. The driver opened the front door and put the luggage in the cab. He opened the back door and let her get in.

"Take me to the station," she said.

As they passed the candy store she glimpsed old Mr. Stubbs inside with the morning papers. She laughed softly, thinking that he would save the afternoon paper for her, but she would never claim it. The big man wasn't standing in front of the store this morning, and she laughed again.

Then she thought of Duke Bolden. She thought of his boss, Howard Cannon, and she thought of the African Methodist Church. She thought of the girl, Rida Malloy, wondering what she would be like. She wondered how she would fit into the town where Duke Bolden had lived. How would she make out there? Would she actually try to get the colored boy out of prison, and what would happen if she succeeded?

She would see. She would see when she got to the town where Duke Bolden had lived before he went to prison.

CHAPTER XI

THE CANNON BUILDING was six stories high, and the outside was all red brick. It was the home office of the Cannon Construction Company, but the firm used only the fourth and fifth floors. The other floors were rented out in office space, and the blackboard in the lobby carried the names of the people and firms and their office numbers.

When she walked into the lobby she went slowly over to the blackboard, but there was no appearance of uncertainty in the way she walked. She stopped at the blackboard and studied the names and numbers. Howard Cannon's name was not there, only the name of the company, and it covered two floors.

She turned, looking toward the elevators. There were two passenger elevators. One was moving, the big hand over the elevator door indicating the upward progress of the elevator. The other elevator was on the main floor; the door was open, and the elevator boy was standing just outside, talking to two men.

She walked over to them.

"On which floor will I find Mr. Cannon?" she asked. Then she added, "Mr. Howard Cannon."

The three of them looked at her, noticing the tall figure in the blue dress and light straw hat with the narrow brim. She had her hair braided and bound in a knot beneath her hat, and she wore very little makeup. She looked young and cool and interesting.

"The Cannon offices are on the fourth and fifth floors," one of the men said. "I guess somebody up there could take care of whatever business you want."

She looked at the man levelly. He was about fifty, little and well-dressed, and evidently somebody. He also gave the

impression that he wanted everybody to know that he was somebody.

"I want to see Mr. Cannon personally," she said. "That's why I want to know which floor his office is on."

"Do you have an appointment with him?"

"No," she said coldly, wondering what business of his it was.

"Do you know him?"

"No," she said, fighting the anger back, trying to control the twitching at the corner of her mouth. "No, I don't know him."

"Then I doubt you could see him at all. Mr. Cannon is a very busy man, and—"

"If you will please tell me which floor his office is on," she said in sharp, crisp words, "I'll find whether I can see him or not."

The man colored. "I was trying to help—" he began.

She turned to the elevator boy, deliberately snubbing him.

"Will you tell me which floor Mr. Cannon's office is on?" she asked.

"Fifth floor," the elevator boy said. "I'll take you up."

She said, "Thank you."

She walked into the elevator, not looking at the man. The boy followed her and closed the door.

On the fifth floor a woman sat in a cubicle. She was in her late forties. She wore glasses and had her greying hair twisted up on the top of her head. She was working a telephone switchboard, plugging in instruments, taking them out, talking in a pleasant, business-like tone of voice. Her voice sounded a great deal younger than she looked.

"Yes?" she asked, when Alice halted at the cubicle.

"I'd like to see Mr. Cannon, please."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No."

"What's your name?"

"Miss Caldwell."

For a while the woman was busy at the switchboard, tak-

ing incoming and outgoing calls. After a long time she turned back to Alice.

"Mr. Cannon isn't in right now. He's out of town."

"Do you know when he'll be in?"

"I don't know. He's on a business trip—he's been away for almost a week now. If you'd like to see someone else . . ."

"No," she said. "I want to see Mr. Cannon."

"It's very hard to see Mr. Cannon without an appointment. What did you wish to see him about?"

She thought rapidly, knowing that if she said she wanted a job the woman would refer her to someone else. But that was not the way she wanted it.

"It's personal," she told the woman.

"Then perhaps you should write him and ask for an appointment," the woman suggested coldly.

"I'll be back tomorrow then," Alice said. "He might be in then."

"But what do you want with him? Who are you?"

She said firmly, "It's personal. I'll be back tomorrow."

"But we don't expect Mr. Cannon back tomorrow. We don't expect him back for some time."

She felt a streak of stubbornness in her. She would not be defeated this way.

"I don't care when you expect him," she said. "I'll keep coming here. I'll come here every day until I see him."

She turned and walked away from the woman.

She came in every day after that, doggedly, persistently, asking to see him. She knew that it was foolish, but she also knew that it was an impressive kind of foolishness. When she did get to see Howard Cannon, she knew he was going to hire her. She would make him hire her. More than that, she would make him notice her after he hired her.

CHAPTER XII

HE HAD spent five days in the hotel room, most of the time in drunken stupor. On the afternoon of the sixth day he

came out of it for a while and was clearheaded. He felt weak and hungry; that was one thing about him—however much he drank, he was always able to eat. He guessed that was what saved his stomach. Whiskey couldn't get at the lining of a man's stomach if he ate like a horse. And, despite his sixty-odd years, Howard Cannon still ate like a horse.

He thought of what they said about him at the office: "He ought to stop all that drinking. Old as he is it's a wonder his heart doesn't stop on him. It will one of these days, too."

He grinned. He supposed that his heart would stop on him some day; in time every man's heart stopped on him.

It was a hot afternoon, and the pajamas which he wore had a stale, sickish smell to them. The whole room smelled of sweat and whiskey, and his breath was laden with the heavy whiskey odor. He pushed his big bulk up to a sitting position, using his elbows, then his hands. There was a dozen or more whiskey bottles strewn about the floor, and his clothes lay in a dirty heap. From the mirror he caught a glimpse of himself, his huge, pajama-clad body, his bloated face with beads of sweat at the forehead, and his shock of snow-white hair.

He got up from the bed and walked on steady feet to the bathroom, where he brushed his teeth thoroughly, using a greenish toothpaste with chlorophyll in it. He rinsed a glass and started drinking water from the cold-water spigot; it tasted terrible but he drank glass after glass, knowing that the water would wash some of the whiskey from his system.

Back in his room he sat on the bed and picked up the telephone. He was hungry, greedily hungry. He ordered steak with onions and french fries, lettuce and tomatoes with mayonnaise, and a quart of milk. Then he lay back on the bed. He lay there and kept his mind blank until the hellhop came in, wheeling his food before him.

He said, "Hello, boy."

The bellhop grinned. He was Italian, small and young. He had quick black eyes, good features, and he was clean-cut and intelligent. He looked at Howard Cannon with the deep

respect which the very poor have for the free-hearted rich. Howard Cannon watched him set the food on a table, then put a dollar bill on the tray.

The bellhop said, "Anything else, Mr. Cannon?"

"Sure, boy. Go out and buy me a safety razor and some blades and some shaving cream. Okay, boy?"

The bellhop hesitated, then said, "If you want me to, Mr. Cannon, I could send up a barber."

"I don't want a barber, boy. I want a safety razor and some blades and shaving cream. Do you think you can remember that, boy?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Cannon."

"Okay, boy!"

He turned to the food, and the bellhop went out of the door, closing it softly behind him. He ate the steak and french fries and lettuce and tomatoes, and he washed it all down with the quart of milk. Afterward he lit a cigar and drew the smoke deep into his lungs, gradually filling the room with the pleasant smell of tobacco smoke.

He felt wonderful. He was sixty, and he was a drunkard; but he knew how to carry his years, and he knew how to get drunk.

The bellhop returned, knocking on the door. He came in at Howard Cannon's order.

"Here it is, Mr. Cannon," he said.

"Okay, boy. Just leave it there on the dresser. And you can clear away the dishes."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Cannon."

For a while the boy was busy with the dishes. He stacked everything neatly on the tray. Then he looked at the big man.

"Mr. Cannon."

"What is it, boy?"

"I was wondering, sir—" He hesitated, uncertain.

"What is it, boy? What do you want?"

"You see, sir, I think I'd like to get into the building industry, and I wondered if you could help me."

Howard Cannon laid his cigar aside. "I see," he said slowly. "And just what do you have in mind—what do you want to do in the building industry?"

"I'd like to be a bricklayer, sir."

"What's wrong with being a bellhop? You're a damned good bellhop. Why do you want to be a lousy bricklayer?"

"Well, sir, a bellhop makes a little money, but not too much. But a bricklayer makes good money."

"Your father living, boy?"

"No, sir."

"What did he do when he was living?"

"He was a bellhop."

"All right. If being a bellhop was good enough for your father, why isn't it good enough for you?"

"Well, you see—"

"You think you're better than your father, boy?"

"No, sir. Only—"

"Look, Phil, there's nothing wrong with being a bellhop," he said. "What the world needs now is better bellhops. All you need to do, Phil, is try to be the best damned bellhop in the business, and let the damned lousy bricklayers alone. Do you get that, boy?"

"I guess so, sir."

"All right. Now you go bring me two fifths of whiskey—the same brand, mind you—and a bowl of ice. Okay, boy?"

"Yes, sir."

The bellhop went doubtfully out of the room.

Howard Cannon grinned, his plates showing white and too-perfect. How many times had he used that line to beat down men working for him? It was a thin dodge, but it worked every time.

He thought of another time, when Duke Bolden had come to his office. That was years before, when he was still in high school. Miss Ruffin, who operated the telephone switchboard, had called him.

"Mr. Cannon," she said. "Duke Bolden is here to see you."

He had frowned. Although he had liked the boy and was doing what he could to see that he got a fair chance in life, Howard Cannon had never encouraged visits from Duke.

"What does he want?" he asked Miss Ruffin.

"I think it's something about his job."

He had been irritated. Duke Bolden was only seventeen, and he had had to pull strings to get him on a construction job as it was. Now he didn't want any trouble out of the boy. He wouldn't tolerate any trouble out of the boy.

"Well," he had barked at Miss Ruffin, "what about his job?"

"I think he wants to change jobs. I don't think he wants to be a laborer."

"Oh," he said. "All right—send him in."

Duke was a gangling tall boy then, well-mannered and clean-cut. Already he had established himself as an outstanding high school end, and Howard Cannon was proud of the part he had played in looking out for the boy. But he had always been a little harsh when talking to him.

"Hello, boy," he said when Duke came in.

"Hello, Mr. Cannon."

There was respect and reverence in the colored boy's voice. Howard Cannon noted, with inward pleasure, that the boy liked him a great deal.

"Sit down, boy," he said. "Go ahead, *sit down*."

He managed to put a little reproach into his command, as if Duke should have had sense enough to sit down without being told. He was deliberately making the boy feel ill at ease. Duke eased himself into a chair, not once taking his deep brown eyes off the older man. Howard Cannon let him sit there until he squirmed uneasily in the chair.

"Well, boy," he said, "you having any trouble on the job?"

"No, sir."

"You'd better not," he told the boy. "I had the devil of a time putting you on that job. You're too young to be doing that kind of work, and I had to square you with the union, too. You understand that, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you understand that it's part of your job to get along with the other fellows, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, remember that now."

Duke said nothing. Cannon knew that he was browbeating the boy. It served his purpose.

"All right," he said. "We've got that clear. Now what do you want?"

Duke looked at him with unflinching brown eyes. Clearly he had a great respect for Howard Cannon, but he showed no fear of the man.

"I'd like to be an apprentice," he said. "I'd like to be a carpenter's apprentice."

Howard Cannon wasn't surprised at all, but he pretended surprise.

"A carpenter's apprentice!" he snorted. "What th' hell do you want to be a lousy carpenter for? Haven't you got a job already? Didn't I give you a job when you asked for one?"

"Yes, sir. But it's only as a construction laborer. If I don't become some kind of apprentice while I'm still young, I'll always be a laborer."

"What th' hell's wrong with being a laborer, boy? Somebody has to do the labor work, don't they? What th' hell's so degrading about that?"

"Nothing, sir. Only I'd like to be a carpenter or brick-layer or cement finisher or something."

"Why? Why would you want to be one of those lousy phonies? Why don't you want to be just a good old, plain, everyday honest laborer?"

"Would you want to be a laborer, sir?"

For a moment he sputtered. It was a telling question. He had to think fast.

"By God," he said, "if I had to make a choice I think I'd be a laborer before I'd be a lousy carpenter. Yes, sir—I just believe I would."

"But you don't have to make the choice, sir. I think you'd feel different if you had to make the choice."

That caught him again. He had to be careful—this colored boy was smart.

"Look, boy," he said, "you don't remember your father, do you?"

"No, sir."

"Well, he was a laborer, boy—the best damned laborer I ever had. Yes, sir! He was right on the job until the last. He was right there, backing a concrete truck up to a pier hole. He was holding the chute and directing the driver, and he stumbled, and the truck wheel—"

He broke off, seeing that the boy was properly touched. For a moment he sat still, remembering how it was, his mind seeing again the way the wheels, with all the tons of concrete weighting them, had squashed the man. Duke had been four or five then.

"Look, boy," he said, "are you ashamed of the fact that your father was a construction laborer?"

"Why, no, sir!"

"By God, you'd better not be, boy! You'd better not be because he was the best damned laborer in the world. Do you think you're better than your father, boy?"

"No, sir."

"Then why th' hell can't you be a laborer like he was? Why do you want to be a lousy carpenter? Why, for God's sake?"

Duke hadn't answered that. He hadn't known how.

"Look, boy—you go ahead and be the best damned laborer on that job. Never mind the lousy carpenters. It's the laborer that's the backbone of the building industry—without the laborer the whole industry would be shot to hell."

Duke Bolden sat silent before the old man. When he spoke again to the boy, his tone was placating.

"You go on to school, boy. You go on and play football the way you've been doing. And in the summer you work like I tell you to. Never mind if it's a pick and shovel, or a

concrete buggy. I'll take care of you. I've always done that, haven't I?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, by God, I always will. You play football and finish high school, and I'll see to it that you go to college. How would you like that, boy? How would you like to go to University?"

He liked the way the boy's face lighted up at the mention of University. "I'd like that, sir."

"All right, then. You do that, and we'll see about University. You're good, boy—you could play college football right now. You're going to play for University—I'll see to that. Now isn't that better than being a lousy carpenter's apprentice?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Forget it. You go on back to your job and do like I tell you. And you behave yourself, boy."

"Yes, sir. . ."

Duke Bolden went back to construction labor. . .

The bellhop knocked on the door, then entered, bringing the bottles of whiskey and ice.

Howard Cannon pointed to the table. "Put it there, boy."

The bellhop placed everything on the table, then discreetly withdrew.

Howard Cannon went to the bathroom and rinsed the glass, then poured a little water into the glass. He thought for a moment that perhaps he should have ordered soda or seltzer water, but he knew the whiskey would go just as well with plain water. The thing, he decided, was to get on with the drinking. He had eaten, and his stomach was lined; he had allowed just enough time to elapse so that the food would be settled, so that he would not gag over the whiskey, losing what he had eaten.

He splashed lumps of ice into the water. He tilted the whiskey bottle, pouring, watching the whiskey stain the water a

light brownish color, seeing the water and whiskey rise together to the rim of the glass.

He settled himself back on the bed and lifted the glass. He drank slowly, knowing that he would not gag that way, that his stomach would not rebel so long as he did not rush the whiskey. Little by little. Drink slowly, deliberately, nurse yourself back into a stupor again. Sleep it off. Wake up and eat. Then try it all over again.

His mind turned swiftly, unerringly to Duke Bolden again. He had been gruff with the boy, and hard. When Duke graduated from high school, he had sent for him, but when Miss Ruffin called to say that Duke was outside, he had merely told her to send Duke down to a men's clothing store and tell him to get whatever he wanted. The next day he was to report for work.

He had watched the way Duke worked; he had reports of his conduct on jobs. Whether it was with pick and shovel, sledge hammer, or whether it was the mad race with concrete buggies, the boy had held his own with the oldtimers.

He had seen to it that the boy lived in the "Y"; he had made sure that he went to church and Sunday School every Sunday—that he received a good religious foundation in the church of his father's choice. He had learned that Duke went to high school dances with a girl named Rida Malloy; he had made sure that Rida was a good girl, that she went to the African Methodist Church with Duke.

What more could he have done than that? He could not be a father to the boy. It wouldn't have been wise for him to become overly familiar with Duke. He had attended all the college games in which Duke had played, but he had not thought it wise to congratulate the boy.

He had been sure that Duke could take care of himself.

But somewhere he had failed the colored boy. Somewhere he had let the boy down.

Night came slowly, shutting the last light out of the windows and plunging the room into semi-darkness.

Still he drank on.

CHAPTER XIII

THERE WAS A MEMO on his desk which said that a Miss Caldwell had been in daily during the past two weeks asking for him.

He picked up the telephone.

"Miss Ruffin," he said. "Who is Miss Caldwell?"

"I don't know, Mr. Cannon. She refused to say just who she is or what she wanted. She comes in every day asking for you."

"Has she been in today?"

"Not yet, Mr. Cannon."

"And you don't know what she wants?"

"No, Mr. Cannon. I asked her several times, but she said it was personal and she wanted to see you."

"All right, Miss Ruffin. When she comes in again let me know."

He hung up the telephone, wondering who the hell Miss Caldwell was.

He was busy all morning. It was strange how things came up the moment he returned to the office. He could stay away a week, two weeks or a month, and everything seemed to go along smoothly. Nobody consulted him, but things got done. Then, when he returned, everybody had to see him about everything.

He sent for a secretary from the time-keeping department on the fourth floor and had Miss Ruffin start sending people in. Some of them were important men in the building industry, and some of them were run-of-the-mill. He dealt with all of them, his mind sharp now; he made snap decisions, never hesitating.

For four hours straight he sat at his desk, receiving callers, telephoning, and dictating. Now and then his mind strayed from what he was doing to the girl who had been coming in regularly during his absence.

It was a little after twelve, and he was getting ready to go to lunch, when Miss Ruffin called.

"Mr. Cannon," she said, "Miss Caldwell is here."

"All right," he said. "Send her in in five minutes." He turned to the secretary. "That's all for now. You may go to lunch. I'll call you if I need you this afternoon."

She smiled. "Thank you, Mr. Cannon."

She left his office.

When the door opened and she walked into his office he knew he had been right in sending the secretary away. This girl was important, he knew, and somehow he sensed that she was important to him. She walked toward him slowly; she walked with the flowing movement to her body, but she was not flaunting herself. She had on a blue skirt and a white blouse. The skirt reached halfway down between her knees and ankles, full at the bottom and tight around the slender waist. The sleeves of her white blouse ballooned out from her shoulders to her elbows, where they were drawn in tight. She had a high box collar and a little woman's blue tie. Her head was bare, her brownish hair falling almost to her shoulders. He saw the deep eyes, the almost-sunken cheeks, the faintest smile on her lips, and he did not notice that her face was commonplace. She was carrying a white pocketbook, and her shoes were white.

She came almost to his desk, and then she stopped still and looked at him and smiled slowly. She stood there, and he felt all the shocking depth of her eyes and all the challenge of her smile. God, he thought suddenly. Whatever kind of girl is this? He suddenly felt sorry that he was an old man now; he never thought he'd feel just like this.

But he never showed what he felt.

"You're Miss Caldwell?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Sit down, Miss Caldwell."

"Thank you, Mr. Cannon."

He noticed how deliberate and husky—and cool—her voice

was. She's old, he thought. In years she's still a kid. But she's old—old.

She sat down, her feet and knees together, her skirt straight and down, her eyes on him, the smile gone. Still he felt a stir of regret at his age again. However she sat—however proper—the body and the appeal were there. He had to force himself to ignore all this.

"What can I do for you, Miss Caldwell?"

"I want a job, Mr. Cannon."

He sputtered then. He knew that he hadn't kept the surprise and disappointment off his face. Somehow he had thought of her all morning. Then she had come in, and he had got all excited over her. It had been a tremendous build-up. And all she wanted was a job! Just another girl looking for work.

"Oh," he said disappointedly. "You want a job?"

She nodded.

"What kind of job do you want, Miss Caldwell?" Try as he would, he could hardly keep the anger out of his voice.

"Office work," she told him. "Any kind of office work."

He leaned forward, looking at her, no longer trying to hide his impatience and anger.

"Isn't this an unusual way to apply for a job, Miss Caldwell? I can't see any point in your making such an issue of seeing me personally. I don't understand why you didn't tell Miss Ruffin out there that you were looking for a job."

She smiled again now, and he could see that she was still sure of herself. Clean and cool and sure of herself.

She said, "I needed the job, Mr. Cannon. I wanted to make sure that I got the job. I want to go to work. If I told them out there, they would send me to personnel, and I couldn't give them any references. I wouldn't get the job. I knew that if I could see you—if I talked to you—I'd have a better chance."

The anger left his face. The girl seemed sincere; she looked as if she really wanted a job. And he knew that she never would have been hired through personnel. He studied her,

and he felt respect for her. She was smart, resourceful. And she was probably desperate.

"Do you have any experience at all, Miss Caldwell?" he asked, his voice gentle.

"Only college. I studied business the last two years."

"What college?"

"I went to University."

He said, "Oh!" He looked at her with new interest.

"I need the job, Mr. Cannon. I need it very much."

"What made you pick me, Miss Caldwell?"

Her eyes were frank when she answered him. "I tried other places and didn't get anywhere. They wanted girls with experience. I didn't have any experience—any references." Her voice became indignant. "How can a girl have references if she's never had a job? That's why I came to you, sir. I knew you went to University, and I thought you'd help."

"I see," he said.

"If you'd only give me a job, Mr. Cannon—"

"Just what is your first name, Miss Caldwell?"

"Alice. Alice Caldwell."

"You live here?"

"I do now, sir."

"Where did you live before?"

She told him where she had been born.

"Where are your parents?"

"My mother died when I was very small. My father is—I guess just somewhere."

"I'm sorry," he said.

She said, "That's all right."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one. Almost twenty-two."

"You sure you can do office work?"

"Yes, sir. I learned typing and shorthand in high school, and I studied business at University."

"This is quite unusual, you know," he told her. "We always hire through personnel here."

That was just so much talk. He knew that he was going to give her a job.

She said, "Please, Mr. Cannon. I wouldn't have a chance there. They wouldn't give me any consideration at all."

"I understand that. That's why I'm going to hire you myself."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Cannon! Thank you ever so much."

He made his voice gruff. "All right, Miss Caldwell. You report to me tomorrow morning. I need a girl here with me whenever I'm in town. When I'm out of town you'll work in timekeeping."

"Thank you, Mr. Cannon. *Thank* you!"

"Okay," he said brusquely. "Good day."

"Good day, Mr. Cannon."

CHAPTER XIV

BEFORE THE END of the first week everybody on the fourth and fifth floors knew that a young girl named Alice Caldwell had been hired as Howard Cannon's personal secretary. The female employees didn't like it; they didn't like the way she got the job. They cluttered around in the morning talking; they met in the ladies room and gossiped.

"So *that's* the way they do it now, eh? That's the way you get to be the boss's personal secretary. No wonder I'm stuck in accounting."

"Maybe I should've tried it myself when I first came here. Guess I'm in timekeeping for good."

"Who's she anyway? How did she manage to swing it in the first place?"

"Who knows? She went to University, Miss Ruffin says. She just walked in and asked for a job, and he hired her."

"She never has anything to say to the rest of the girls."

"Oh, she's the tight-mouthed one, all right."

Soon the girls on the fourth and fifth floors of the Cannon Building had nothing to do with her. Like the girls at University, they left her alone. The men in Howard Cannon's

employ were different. Single and married, young and old, they came around, smiling, inviting her out to lunch, trying to get next to the girl who had calmly walked in and secured herself a job as personal secretary to Howard Cannon.

But now she was elusive. She smiled at none of them, teased none of them, gave none of them false hopes. When Howard Cannon was in his office she went there and stayed with him; when he was out she went to timekeeping and worked silently.

No one could find a flaw with her work. Office work was a routine, and she fell into the routine quietly, always discreet, saying little.

She kept away from the other girls but she knew what they were talking about. Just like the girls at University, only older and more hopeless. Office girls, silly talk, punctuated with laughter. Always the talk—the complaints, the gossip and accusations; talks about men, about men's wives, talks about the Old Man. And talk about her.

She got along well with Howard Cannon. He was exacting, but she quickly learned the way he wanted things done; he seldom had to tell her anything twice. Little by little she discovered things she could do to please him; more and more he smiled when he came in the morning and found that she had taken over some routine matter that he usually attended to. They did very little talking.

"You're a good girl, Alice," he said one day. "I'm damned glad I hired you."

She colored slightly. "Thank you, Mr. Cannon."

"What do you do in your spare time?"

"Not much of anything, Mr. Cannon. Mostly I stay in. I have a record machine, and I like to play records."

"You're awfully quiet and sensible for a young girl."

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Cannon—"

The weeks went by. Now Howard Cannon didn't drink quite so much, and he spent more time at the office each day. He was kind and friendly to Alice; often he talked about his own days at University.

"That was a long time ago," he said. "I'm an old man now, Alice."

He watched her, waiting for the usual, "Oh, you're not so old, Mr. Cannon." Instead she smiled and said, "I don't guess age means too much any more, Mr. Cannon. It all depends on the man himself."

He smiled, pleased. "You always seem to say the right things, Alice."

She looked at him levelly. "I say what I think, Mr. Cannon. I'm glad if what I think pleases you."

Occasionally he asked her about Duke Bolden.

"I didn't know him too well," she said. "Of course I went to all the football games and saw him play. Then sometimes I would see him on the campus and say 'Hello, Duke,' and he would say 'Hello, Alice,' just like everybody else. He had a good memory for names; he could call nearly everybody there by his first name. All the boys and girls liked him—everybody but the coach."

"Maybe I shouldn't have sent him to University," he said. "He was the first colored boy ever went there. Maybe I should have sent him to a college where colored boys had gone before."

"Oh, it didn't make much difference. Duke was awfully nice and friendly, and the kids liked him. The kids at University never thought much about things like his being colored. That's sort of old fashioned anyway, Mr. Cannon."

Howard Cannon frowned. "I don't see why he had to go and do it. He had a swell chance. He don't know how much fight I had to put up to get him into University. They were talking about all that foolishness about colored students not getting along with the others. Then, when he got along so well, I thought I had done something big. I thought he would make it easy for others, but he got into all that trouble."

"How long does he have to stay in prison, Mr. Cannon?"

The way she asked the question, it sounded very innocent.

"Oh, I don't know. They gave him two to ten years, and

he's been in there about a year now. In another two years he may be paroled."

"I'll bet he'll be glad to get out."

"Maybe he'll learn some sense, anyway. He had everything in front of him, and he went and did what he did. I guess he deserves what he got."

She said slowly, "I don't know, Mr. Cannon. I didn't know Duke too well, but I heard the boys on the team talking. They said the coach was always mean to Duke—said he did everything he could to make Duke quit the team."

Howard Cannon gestured with his hand. "All right. The boy put up with that kind of thing for three years and played the best left end in the business. Why in hell couldn't he have put up with it a few more months and graduated?"

"I don't know," she said. "All the same, I bet he'll be glad to get out on parole."

That night Alice sat on the divan in her apartment, the record player in reaching distance, records piled upon the divan before her. She was fully dressed, except for her shoes and stockings. She stretched her bare legs out comfortably before her, resting her bare feet in a chair in front of the divan. She played an endless procession of records, some hit tunes and some collector's items; she played jazz music, bop, Afro-Cuban numbers, calypso songs with British West Indies accents, tangos, and folk songs. There was a quart bottle of beer on the floor near the divan and a half-filled glass beside it.

She picked up the glass and drained it. Then she lighted a cigarette. Pushing all the records to one end of the divan, she lay down, taking her feet from the chair and letting them rest on top of the records. The music wafted hotly from the record machine while she sent spirals of smoke upward, filling the room.

She thought of Howard Cannon and the office and his talk about Duke Bolden. Everything that she said to Howard Cannon about Duke had been calculated, every word had its purpose. She would keep it up; little by little she would

plant the idea that the colored boy had been victimized, had been wronged.

There were times, especially around five in the afternoon, when he acted as if he hated to leave the office. He knew it was time for her to get off, but he acted as if he hated to see her leave. He was rich and old—and lonely. She thought of what they said around the office. He was over sixty years old, and he went on wild drinking sprees. For weeks at a time he lay in a hotel room, drunk. The doctor had warned him several times. One of these days his heart would stop on him.

Since she started working there, he hadn't been on a drunk. He hadn't missed a day at the office since he hired her. Why did he come to the office daily now? She thought she knew the answer.

But she had to take first things first. There still was Duke Bolden in prison. He wanted out. She hadn't seen or heard from him since he went to prison, but she knew he wanted out.

All right, she was going to get him out. But she couldn't depend upon Howard Cannon entirely.

There was that African Methodist Church. When a man—especially a man with Duke Bolden's background—came up for parole, he ought to have a church behind him. There ought to be a preacher asking that he be released. There ought to be a church congregation behind the movement.

She had to go to the African Methodist Church. She had to see the minister, had to get to know the congregation. Perhaps, even, she would have to get to know that girl—Rida Malloy—that Duke had spoken about. That way she couldn't fail.

And after he got out on parole? Those wild promises she had made—all the acting and all the tears—didn't matter now. He would be there for her to take or leave—however she decided. His hands would be tied.

She lay there smoking far into the night, thinking, schem-

ing, planning. The record player went on and on, filling the room with hot, wild music.

CHAPTER XV

SHE LINGERED THERE at the gate for a long time, just watching the people go inside. The church was so big and so beautiful, and there were so many people. The sun was bright and warm. The men and women were carefully dressed for church, some of the women wearing beautiful dresses and hats. She saw the teen-aged boys and girls entering church together, and she knew that once Duke and Rida had likewise walked through the big iron gate and on through the church door.

Where was Rida now? Rida would be in her early twenties; there was any number of girls of that age going into church. Some were plain and some startlingly beautiful. But she did not know what Rida was like.

After a long time she left the place where she was standing in the street and slowly entered the iron gate, but there was no fear or hesitation about the way she walked, her long legs moving freely in measured strides.

Older people called soft greetings to one another. Boys and girls of high-school age said hello. Little kids, free from Sunday School, scampered about. Several people glanced at her briefly, curiously. That was all. She was a stranger. But what surprised her was that there were other white people in church. Not many, just a handful, scattered through the congregation. Some, though, were part of families, the first interracial families Alice had ever seen, close up.

She walked along with them, her eyes deep and impersonal—walked as if she was one of them. She, the tall young girl, strongly built, dressed in church attire, walking along with them as if she had attended the African Methodist Church for years.

Inside the worshipers moved on to familiar pews, ignoring

the ushers. She hesitated, waited. An usher motioned, spoke softly. "This way."

She followed the white-clad figure down the carpeted aisle, sat where the usher indicated. Once settled in her seat, she looked about the church. The church was packed. She looked at the stained windows, the beautifully arranged pews, the high ceilings and white round pillars. She saw all the choirs—Senior Choir, Gospel Choir, and two Youth Choirs. Which one of these had Duke sung in?

Funny, she thought, how she saw everything in relation to what it had been to Duke.

The minister read through the Scripture lesson, his voice clear and correct and solemn. The woman next to her held a Bible to Alice, pointing with one stubby finger to the lines the minister was reading. The two of them shared the Bible together.

When the minister finished, Alice looked at the woman, smiled. "Thank you," she said.

The woman was short and fat, and when she smiled back good-natured friendliness shone in her face. My first friend, Alice thought. Then she remembered that all her life she had repulsed friendly advances, had lived to herself. Now she would need friends in this African Methodist Church.

One of the choirs was singing. She saw the ushers moving down the aisles with collection plates, heard the clink of silver. Quickly she reached into her purse and extracted a bill.

The fat woman touched her. "No!" she whispered, pointing to the bill. She looked at the woman, frowning, not understanding. The woman held up a dime. Alice nodded, smiled. When the usher came to them she noticed that everyone had put a dime into the plate. She dropped her dime.

"Thank you," she said to the fat woman.

The woman leaned forward, whispered, "It's for the poor. We don't give *to* the poor—we share *with* the poor. That's why everybody puts the same thing in the plate. It's the consecration offering."

"I see," she said.

Consecrated, she thought. Set apart for the poor. Then, suddenly, she thought: Poor Duke. No wonder he was so good and easy-going and trusting. Raised among these people, being one of them.

The minister was preaching. He talked about the times when God laughed at men. Times when they were vain, when they were boastful of their riches and good fortune, when they were cruel and merciless to the weak, when they betrayed the trusting. Then God laughed, and they were damned.

She listened, and she thought of Duke. Everything she saw or heard in that African Methodist Church made her think of Duke—made her understand him better.

And she understood the great harm she had done to the boy.

She sat there, watching and listening until it was all over. She stood and repeated benediction with the others.

The fat woman reached forward, grasping her hand. "I'm Mrs. Jones," she said.

She smiled. "I'm Alice—Alice Caldwell."

"This your first time at our church?"

"Yes, it is," she said, noting that, although the woman was asking all the questions, she was trying to be friendly.

"How did you like the sermon?"

"The sermon? I thought it was—fine."

"Oh, I'm so glad you liked it. That was our minister, Reverend Berry, preaching. Perhaps you would like to meet him."

"No," she said quickly—too quickly. She looked at her watch, covering up. "I would like to meet him, Mrs. Jones, but I have to go. Perhaps some other time."

"Well, I'm sorry you have to go so soon." The fat woman was disappointed. "But come again whenever you feel like it. This is a friendly church, and everybody's welcome."

When she got outside she hailed a taxi. She wondered what had come over her, what she had been thinking about.

It was just a Negro church service. How had she become so wrapped up in it?

I won't go there again, she thought. I don't need that church and all that preaching and consecrated offerings. I'll get old man Cannon to get him out of prison.

She went to her apartment and pulled off her shoes and sat on the divan, her feet drawn up beneath her. She went through the record album, playing records, once more filling the room with heat.

CHAPTER XVI

"GOOD MORNING, Mr. Cannon."

"Hello there, Alice. How's everything this morning?"

She smiled, standing and taking the sorted mail over to his desk. This time she wore a straight black skirt and a thin white summer blouse. The blouse was of transparent material; the straps and upper part of her slip were clearly visible beneath the blouse, leaving her waistline and breasts plainly outlined, though still concealed.

The Old Man was in good humor, and he watched her smilingly as she placed the mail on his desk.

"Everything's fine, Mr. Cannon."

"Have a nice weekend?"

"Fine," she told him. "I didn't go any place—except Sunday when I went to church. The rest of the time I played records."

He arched a white eyebrow.

"I didn't know you were a church girl, too," he said after a moment.

"I believe in going to church. It's good for you," she said. It touched him. She could tell by the way he looked at her.

For all his age, for all his money and drunken ways, he was deeply touched by her. Little by little she made sure of it. Day by day she worked on him as a plan slowly formed in her mind. Little things to show him that he was more than just a boss. Telling him when a suit was exceptionally be-

coming to him. The way she smiled when she handed him something. The way she was pleasant and efficient and correct. She never became overbold, she never made open advances.

But as the days of the week speeded by, she became certain. There was no doubt about it. Howard Cannon was falling in love with her. Day after day spent at the office—something that had never happened before she started working for him. Night after night when it was time for her to go home, he started his stalling. He hated to see her go.

"Er, Alice, could you take care of this before you leave, please."

"Certainly, Mr. Cannon."

"I hate to keep detaining you all the time when everybody else is going home. But this has to be done right away."

Inwardly she would smile. It was hardly ever anything that wouldn't wait until the next day. But she would do whatever he wanted rapidly and pleasantly.

"Is that all, Mr. Cannon?"

"I think that's all, Alice. Sorry I had to keep you."

"Oh, that's all right. I don't mind at all."

"But I've got to quit doing that," he said. "It's not fair to keep imposing upon you."

She looked at him directly, unsmiling. "After all, you gave me a job, Mr. Cannon. You gave me a job when I needed one. When I came here I didn't know anyone, and I didn't have any job. Whatever I can do for you now, why—I'll just be thanking you for what you did for me."

That touched him again. She saw it in the quick emotion that came to his face. She saw it in the sudden tenderness that came to his steel-hard eyes.

"You're a mighty fine woman, Alice," he said softly.

"Thank you, Mr. Cannon. I just try to show gratitude when people are good to me."

He opened his mouth to say something, then stopped. She sensed the storminess of his feelings, the agitation, the impulsive words that he was holding back.

She smiled again.

"Well, good day, Mr. Cannon."

"Good day, Alice."

She went out, feeling the excitement mounting in her. This was more than she had ever thought, more than she had ever dreamed of. If she was careful, if she didn't overplay her hand—She thought of Duke, and she shrugged her shoulders. What did it matter about the colored boy? All she had actually promised him—all he could demand of her—was his freedom. She would see to it that the colored boy went free. But Howard Cannon was a rich man. He was rich and old, and he would die soon.

But first she had to marry him. That wouldn't be easy. It would be no cinch to marry a man who had remained single all through his sixty years of life.

That night she lay on the divan and played records, and all the time she was thinking. Somehow she seemed to think best when she was listening to the record player. If she managed to marry Howard Cannon, Duke could do nothing. He would be on parole, and Howard Cannon would be his boss. She would be the boss' wife. What could he do about that but keep his mouth shut?

Maybe, to make him feel better about the whole thing, she would tell him that she had to marry the Old Man in order to get him out of prison. She did it for his own good. What could he say to that?

She smiled, and the record player played. She lay there on the divan and thought her dark thoughts—she lay there far into the night.

CHAPTER XVII

THE NEXT SUNDAY MORNING she didn't get out of bed. To hell with it, she thought. She wouldn't go to that African Methodist Church again. She wouldn't let those people get under her skin.

She arose at noon, and the sun was shining brightly against

the closed blinds of her bedroom window. Going into the front room, she started the record player, turning it loud and dropping a load of records on the turntable. She went back into the bedroom and pulled off her pajamas, moving slowly, listening to the record player. She made a slow, lazy business of bathing, leaving the bathroom door open so that she could hear snatches of song above the splashing. She walked naked back into the bedroom; she opened the closet door and took out a maroon robe and put it on, drawing the belt loosely around her waist and tying it.

Now she went into the kitchenette, still walking slowly. Her long legs pushed the bottom of her robe open with each step, showing the silken bareness of her calves. The robe hung loose on her, open at the throat and downward, leaving visible the bases of her full, high breasts.

In the kitchen she started a fire under the percolator, then scrambled eggs and made toast. She took a can of orange juice from the refrigerator, poured a glass, then put the can back. She drank the orange juice standing and put the glass in the sink. The smell of coffee was strong and pleasant in the kitchen.

She went into the living room and put on more records, returning again to the kitchen. She ate slowly, listening to the record player, tapping her foot to the beat of jazz music.

This is the way, she thought. It was as easy and profitable to spend the morning in her apartment as it was to go to that church again. And it was a great deal more pleasant. Later, when she was tired of records, she could read or take a nap.

But she was wrong about reading and the nap. Whatever magazine she picked up, she found nothing interesting. Her eyes went over the words without recording their meaning. She gave up reading and tried to take a nap.

Sleep did not come. She lay there, feeling defeated and guilty and bitter and trapped. She couldn't quite understand it, but she knew it had something to do with her not going

to the African Methodist Church. Somehow this Sunday would be fruitless and without meaning to her.

"Damn it," she said suddenly. "Damn it to hell. Damn that half-assed church and all the people who go there."

She stood up and started dressing. From the closet she took a black dinner dress and looked at it, her lips curling in a faint smile. It looked the way she felt. It would show off her body. She put it on carefully, adjusting it, pulling the skirt down tightly over her hips, studying herself in the mirror.

"To hell with them," she said. "To hell with them all."

She went out of the apartment and walked down the stairs to the street, and it was the tail end of Sunday afternoon.

Far down in the next block she saw the blue and white and red and green of neon lights glowing against the light of fading day. Somehow it made her feel sad—somehow it was like night trying to hurry daylight away.

"To hell with it," she said. "To hell with it all."

She walked toward the neon lights, moving her long legs with casual indifference, knowing what the dress and the legs would do to men.

She turned when she reached the neon lights, heard the loud music from the nickel machine before she entered the door. Three or four men stood just outside the door, talking.

"Hello, baby."

"Want me to come in with you and buy you a drink?"

She looked through them, her lips curling. She put her hand on the door and pulled it open. She heard their bleating laughter as she went through the door.

She went in and sat down at the bar and ordered a drink; she lighted a cigarette, then looked around the bar, her eyes deep. The place was crowded, the men common and noisy and debative and half drunk. The women were heavily powdered and heavily rouged and loud. Not far from her a youngish man with a bloated whiskey face was holding court, telling how they ought to run the war in Korea.

"Christ," he shouted. "You should have seen how we did

it in the Pacific—how we beat the Japs. We didn't fool around with them, boy. We let 'em have it."

She looked at him curiously. The Pacific, she thought. To her all of that seemed a long time ago. She was a kid when all of that happened.

"I was with the flame throwers," he boasted. "Christ, you never seen anything like the flame throwers. We had something that looked like soap—we called it napalm. We'd mix it with gasoline—we'd keep mixing it until it was gluey like jelly. Then we'd put it in tanks and pump oxygen in behind it and stick it into the gun turrets. We'd get into the mobile tanks and drive up to a cave full of Japs and cut loose. We'd pump that stuff out of the tanks, and a spark plug would set the gasoline on fire and the damned glue would shoot into the cave like a bat out of hell. Pretty soon the cave would be full of cooked Japs."

She watched him, and something about the way he talked enraged her. The pig, she thought. The dirty, disgusting, bragging animal. She felt hot and cold, and her nerves screamed. She wanted to torture the bragging fool, to play with him and punish him.

He saw her watching him and gave her a smile. She turned her head abruptly, coldly, fingered her drink. She looked at the drink, cold-eyed, knowing the kind of man he was. In a moment he would take the seat beside her. Then he would try to get into a conversation, to get her interested in him. Bed would be the ultimate aim.

She sat there and waited for him to start. When he came to the stool beside hers and sat down, she did not look around.

"Hi, baby," he said. "How's tricks?"

She turned then, looking at him with a steady, level gaze.

She made her voice hard and just loud enough for everybody to hear her. "Beat it," she said.

"Now look, baby," he said. "You got me wrong."

"You look," she said savagely, her voice loud and clear.

"You listen to me, you barroom juichound. I said beat it!"

His whiskey-bloated face flushed red, and she saw the horror and fear in his eyes. He moved back from her swiftly.

She sipped her drink leisurely, knowing that she was attracting furtive glances from everyone, but her eyes remained cold and her expression did not alter. She sat there, strange and attractive, yet not a man dared approach her after hearing her ruthless dismissal of the would-be-hero.

She finished the drink and thrust it from her. "Give me another," she ordered.

The bartender mixed the drink and brought it to her.

"I'm sorry he annoyed you, miss," he said.

"Forget it," she said. "He's just a stupid barroom hero."

The bartender withdrew, his brow knitting doubtfully. She sat there well over an hour, drinking and looking at the others with cold eyes. Finally she stood up and walked out of the place and went back to her apartment. Now she felt relaxed. When she got home she went to bed, not bothering the record player. She had no trouble going to sleep.

But Monday morning found her testy.

"Good morning, Alice."

"Good morning, Mr. Cannon."

"Did you go to church yesterday?"

"No." She did not smile.

"What—no church?"

She was feeling nervous and out of sorts, and she had been thinking about the African Methodist Church. She looked at him and blurted, "I don't just *have* to go to church every Sunday, for goodness sake!"

It surprised him. For a moment he looked at her, his mouth open. Then his eyes became steel hard, and he said in an impersonal voice, "Any mail, Miss Caldwell?"

She got the mail quickly and gave it to him. This time she brushed against him slightly, and when the steely eyes looked searchingly at her, she smiled.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cannon," she said. "I didn't mean to speak like that."

"That's all right." His voice, even, was hard.

"I mean," she said, "I'm not feeling well. That's why I didn't go to church yesterday."

"Oh!" There was relief in his voice. He looked at her closely, his eyes now showing concern. "Are you sure you feel like working today?"

"Oh, yes. It's nothing—really nothing."

"Well, I want you to be sure now."

The rest of the week she was cheerful and thoughtful, making up for the one mistake she had made. She smiled constantly; she found occasions to thank him again for giving her a job and she insisted on staying late to finish her work before going home.

By the end of the week she was on firm ground again. She was sure of herself now; she knew that it was only a matter of time before he made the inevitable approach.

For Howard Cannon was clearly, deeply in love with her.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MISTY RAIN fell over all the city, thin and feather-like, and the taxi driver had to use the windshield wipers. Automobiles crept along in the wispy drizzle. Where trolley tracks lined the street, an automobile straddled the ~~two~~ wet rails, lurched, and turned half around in front of them. The taxi driver used his brakes gingerly.

"They never learn," he said, speaking of the car in front of them. "It's a wonder somebody don't get killed on them tracks."

"I don't see why they don't take them up," Alice said, speaking from the back seat. "They've taken all the trolleys off the street—why do they leave the tracks there?"

"You got me there, lady."

After that he gave all his attention to driving, taking her swiftly to the African Methodist Church.

It was first Sunday, and the church was crowded, despite all the bad weather. Now and then the minister was light and humorous, but he always brought his sermon back to

that dignity and solemnity that shadowed the service. There was a puzzling raggedness about the worship that made it friendly and restful.

Alice watched and listened, feeling deeply sympathetic with the people and their order of service, but little understanding any of it. Now she wanted to know these people. She wanted to be a part of this church.

The minister went on with his long sermon. To her left high-school girls whispered restlessly among themselves and cast frequent glances at the boys in uniform. Small children cooed and squirmed, while parents tried to keep them quiet. Somewhere on the other side of the church a baby cried fretfully until a woman in nurse's uniform and cap took the baby from its mother's arms and carried it to the rear of the church, jostling it as she went.

She listened to the minister, but the corners of her mouth turned down. The stirring unrest was within her.

At last the minister's voice was silent. From some unseen place the organ softly played the Lord's Prayer. Alice bowed her head and chanted the prayer with the others. But there was no peace for her in the soothing music, nothing to lull her unrest, nothing to quiet the straining agitation within her soul.

The chant ended. The minister moved down from the pulpit and walked gravely to the altar reciting his words of invitation. She felt a guilt and fear and longing which her volatile nature had never known before. From high up in the choir loft she heard the singing:

My Lord—He calls me,

He calls me by the thunder,

The trumpet sounds within my soul. . .

She thought of all her cruel and ruthless ways—all her capacity for hurting people, for spoiling all the warmth and generosity of others. She felt now the guilt of having killed a man, of never knowing remorse for the deed, neither at the time or ever afterward. She thought of how she had ruined the colored boy's life, fully and completely; she

knew that nothing she could give him would ever repay him for all the things he had given up because of his pathetic love for her.

Green trees are bending,

Poor sinners stand a-trembling,

The trumpet sounds within my soul. . .

She moved from her pew and walked down the aisle with the overpowering mass of emotions churning within her. Somewhere a woman's thick voice said, "God bless her!" Another woman sobbed softly. A stewardess in white left the front pew and came down the aisle to meet her. The stewardess caught her by the hand, and they walked together all the long way to where the minister waited.

After church they crowded around her with all the handshaking and all the talk. The minister, Reverend Berry, telling her that she must attend a six week's class for new members. Wrinkly-faced old women shaking her hand, fervently telling her they were glad she had "found God." The fat beaming face of the woman who had sat beside her that first morning.

"Hello, Miss Caldwell, Remember me?"

"Oh, hello, Mrs. Jones. Certainly I remember you."

"Well, I'm certainly glad you joined our church."

"I'm glad too. I think I'll like it here."

"God bless you, honey. Hope you'll make yourself right at home. We don't let anybody be a stranger in our church."

All this warmth, all this generosity. They pressed forward, welcoming her, holding nothing back.

But all the time she was waiting, watching—a cold something within her which had never quite melted held her back. She searched all the youngish faces, trying to pick out the one face she had never seen before, trying to guess what Rida Malloy would be like. From all that Duke had said about her she imagined the girl would be tall and pretty and educated. But also she would be friendly and good and modern—she would like dances and games and parties. And by now she would be a school teacher.

Now there were fewer of the older people and more of the young women greeting her. She looked at each of them, her eyes moving over them. A thin girl with black hair curling downward to her shoulders, pretty with her thin face and deep black eyes. But her name was Miss Turner. Others in their early twenties, some pretty, some homely, but none of them named Rida.

Then she saw her to the far side of the church talking to the small kids, and as soon as she saw her she knew who it was. The girl couldn't be anyone but Rida Malloy. As Alice watched she started over toward where all the people were greeting her and welcoming her to the African Methodist Church. She had on a city-country dress done up with buttons down the front and close-fitting waist line, the skirt long and flared out. If there was any fault to her figure, the free full cut of the dress concealed it. She had on white gloves, the span white collar of the dress made her face look pretty and almost ridiculously young. The hat was a white, bell-like affair with turn-down brim, lined by a straight black ribbon. She looked perfectly cool and pretty and innocent.

She walked over toward where Alice was standing, and the kids followed her. She was talking to them, calling them by names, smiling playfully. She made slow progress, what with the kids following her, and the older people speaking to her.

"Hello, Rida."

"Good morning, Mr. Morgan."

"Hello, Rida."

"Hi, Ruth!"

"Miss Malloy," this from a little girl holding an envelope, "give me a dime for my gleaner."

"I gave you one last week, Rebecca."

"But you gave Beverly one last week, and you gave her another one this week. That's not fair."

"Okay—here, catch."

She spun a silver piece into the air, and the one named Rebecca caught it.

"Thank you, Miss Malloy."

"Okay, honey. Run along now."

She still made her slow way toward Alice, smiling, nodding, greeting men and women. A girl of thirteen or fourteen now stopped her. She stood directly before Rida, erect and smiling the way girls do when they are that age.

"Miss Malloy, I know you're going to buy a ticket from me for the boat ride."

"How much are they, Lois?"

"Only a dollar, Miss Malloy."

"If I buy one, Lois, it'll be from you."

"All right, Miss Malloy. Now don't forget."

"I won't, honey. Now run along."

And then she came to Alice and stopped, raising her eyes. She smiled, and Alice felt the fullness of the smile and the serious, friendly darkish-brown eyes and the way the black ribbon around her hat and her black hair blended and how the darkish grey streaks in her dress made lights and shadows, so that it seemed to define the girl—seemed to become an inseparable part of herself.

God, Alice thought, the girl is smart. She is smart, and they think the world of her around this church. Somehow Alice knew that she was the kind of girl who would wait—two years or ten, she would be there waiting when Duke got out of prison.

Something in Alice revolted, something cried out against it. Once more the selfish, greedy part of her nature pushed itself to the forefront. What right did the girl have to be like that? What right did she have to be so good, so sure of herself? What right did she have to wait calmly for Duke, knowing Duke was still the best there was? There she was, working in church, patiently waiting to claim the best for her own.

Alice looked at the open, even-toothed smile of the girl, and something inside her sickened.

"Hello," Rida said, her voice warmly friendly. "I'm Rida Malloy."

"I'm Alice—Alice Caldwell." She took the soft, white-

gloved hand that Rida held out. "You're a teacher, aren't you?"

She saw the mild surprise come into Rida's eyes. "How did you know? Do I have that look about me already?"

Alice let herself smile, made the smile friendly. "I don't know. The way you handled the kids—you seem to know how to talk to them."

Rida laughed then, and the laugh was pleasant. "This church keeps me broke," she said. "But I keep coming here all the time."

"I guess you've come here all your life?" Alice asked.

"Born and bred in here. The way it looks I'll die here." She looked at Alice curiously. "Have you always lived here—in this town?"

Alice shook her head, searching her mind, wondering how best to say what she had to say. "No," she said at last. "I came here looking for a job. I was fresh out of college, and I didn't know a soul when I came here."

"Is that right?" Rida said, showing no particular interest, just being polite. "What college did you attend?"

Inwardly she smiled. It had been easier than she thought it would be. It was so simple the way this colored girl asked just the right questions.

"I went to University. I got my diploma there."

The way it hit the girl was hardly fair, Alice thought. She saw it in her eyes, saw it by the way the smile left her lips, saw how the very mention of University brought so much emotion to the colored girl's face.

Then, suddenly, Rida Malloy was smiling again.

"My," she said. "This certainly is a small world. I know someone who went there once."

"No kidding! Who was it?"

She saw how for a moment Rida Malloy stared at her doubtfully, saw how her lips trembled. I guess, Alice thought quickly, I guess it knocked her cold when she heard about it. I guess it must have torn everything out of her for a while. But she's the kind who'll take any kind of wallop.

At last Rida spoke. "The fellow I was talking about—his name was Duke Bolden."

"Oh, Duke," she said. "Sure I knew Duke. He used to play football."

The colored girl nodded, her eyes on Alice.

"Yes," Alice repeated. "I knew him. He got into trouble."

The colored girl nodded, her lips trembling. She looked at Alice unseeingly, her face strained. She said in a soft, hurt voice, "We were going to get married."

Alice watched the suffering in the colored girl's face and some of the old cruelty came back to her. Now she wasn't surprised at the kind of girl Rida was. She believed deeply, the way all the others in the Afircan Methodist Church believed. She had a great capacity for love and hurt and suffering. She and Duke Bolden. Still she was clinging to a memory, hoping, waiting for another wallop. Alice's lips curled just a little, for she knew how it was going to be; she knew what it was going to mean to all three of them when Duke Bolden got out of prison.

Rida turned suddenly. "Good-by," she said. "And I hope you like—our church. I hope you like it a lot."

Then she was gone.

The smile on Alice's face disappeared and her eyes were very, very deep.

CHAPTER XIX

ONCE A WEEK the new members gathered together in the study with Reverend Berry for instruction in the ways and beliefs of African Methodism. They learned about the founder of African Methodism, about the first church, and about the way African Methodism spread slowly across the United States and on into the British West Indies and Africa.

Reverend Berry lectured much on the why of this denomination. "This church was founded, not because we wanted to worship separately, but because we want to be

able to worship God with the dignity and solemnity of all people. Had we been able to do that in the beginning, there would never have been an African Methodist Church. When the time comes where all people embrace the belief 'God our Father, man our brother,' then African Methodism will cease to exist."

Thus Alice, sitting among the other new members, learned of the days long before the Civil War when Negro Freedmen tried to worship God in Saint George's Methodist Church; she heard how church officials tried to pull them from their knees and force them to go into the balcony even as they knelt in prayer. She sat listening, spellbound, as Reverend Berry related how the great Richard Allen had said to the officials, "Peace, Brothers! Just let us finish prayer—suffer with us this little time—and we will depart from this place and bother you no more."

"You must keep in mind," Reverend Berry said, "that all this happened a long time before Emancipation. Most of these men were former slaves—they had bought their own freedom. They had made their way to Philadelphia, had learned trades—they were carpenters and masons and teamsters." Often he looked at Alice Caldwell, speaking to her pointedly. "I want you to get this, daughter, because you have joined our church. What these men did in Philadelphia rivals anything the Pilgrim Fathers did in England and America."

Alice listened, and she was impressed. She learned of the growth of African Methodism from a single blacksmith shop where a few Freedmen gathered to the great denomination it had now become. She learned of Richard Allen's trips through Delaware and New Jersey in the infancy of the church; she knew how news of the church had spread through the South, even during slavery; she learned of the insurrections by slaves who attended the church, and she heard how the state of South Carolina had once banned the African Methodist Church.

Here was a history that she had never dreamed of, some-

thing she and millions of others had never read in their school books. The gigantic struggle of black men in a great new country, men who were wise and stout, men with vision. Here was an untold story of black men who recognized and fought evil together, even though retarded by their own lack of learning, their own jealousies and hates. Men who had been good and brave, who had dared to do things, to build a church greater than any of them.

In this way the white girl Alice who believed in little save herself and her predatory ways, learned to believe in the African Methodist Church. Every Sunday she went there now. Soon she learned to differentiate between the boys and the girls, the men and the women. She knew the boys in the Boy Scout Pack and Troops, she was on familiar terms with the scoutmaster and Den Mother. She learned how communicants could be comparatively light-hearted on some Sundays, yet dead serious on Communion Sundays. She marched to the altar with the others and partook of the bread and wine, and she went to the church weddings.

Now young people and old people knew her.

She went to Sunday School and listened to the drone of children's voices as they recited lessons; she noticed how the old people went to Sunday School along with the kids, sitting to themselves, poring over the lesson and discussing it.

She kept on friendly terms with Rida Malloy.

"Hello, Alice."

"Hello, Rida. How's the teaching going?"

"All right. How're you getting along in Reverend Berry's class?"

"Oh, I like it. I never knew about Richard Allen and Bethel and all that. I don't see why they don't teach it in schools."

Rida laughed. "I don't know. I've heard about it all my life. I guess I just take it for granted."

"Do you ever hear from Duke, Rida?"

She saw the cloud come across the colored girl's face.

"No. I haven't heard from Duke since—since he got into trouble."

"Didn't you ever write him?"

Rida looked at the white girl steadily. "I know Duke, Alice. I've known him since—since I can remember. I know the way he is. I don't think he would want me to write him or try to see him."

"But I thought you and he—"

The colored girl smiled, but there was sadness in her face.

"Duke and I were very close, Alice. I guess when he gets out of there we still will be. But while he's away—while he's in there, he wouldn't want any of us from the church to see him. He never wrote to any of us, and we never wrote him."

"But how do you know he's getting along all right?" Alice cried. "How do you know what that place is doing to him?"

"We don't know, Alice. If Duke has troubles, he keeps them to himself—he never tells us. We don't know things about Duke. We don't even know what happened at University."

She said, "What do you mean by that? What do you mean—you don't know what happened?"

"We just don't know, Alice."

"But it was in the papers. You must have read it. All of us read it at the school."

"I know," Rida said stoutly. "But the papers said he was drinking, and Duke never took a drink in his life. The papers said he killed that man, and the Duke we knew wouldn't kill."

"But he said he did. He confessed."

The colored girl's lips trembled, and Alice looked away quickly. She hadn't meant for it to go like this. She waited for Rida to get hold of herself, then she looked back.

"I didn't mean to say that, Rida. What I meant to say was he's been there almost two years now, and he ought to be coming up for parole soon. He'll need friends on the outside. He'll need people behind him. People like you, Rida. People in this church ought to be behind him."

"Don't worry," Rida said, spirit in her voice. "We've always been behind Duke. We're still behind him—everyone of us."

"I'm glad, Rida. I didn't know him as well as you did. I just saw him on the campus sometimes, and I saw him playing in the games. Beside that, I didn't know him very well. But if I can do anything—if I can help—I belong to this church too, you know."

The colored girl turned away from her. When she had taken a half dozen steps she looked back and smiled. "Thanks, Alice. I guess I'm sort of stupid sometimes. But it's good of you to want to do something, and—well, thanks."

She walked away.

Alice stood there alone, watching her. She stood there, a tall white girl in a Negro church, looking at the vanishing figure of a Negro girl who had been deeply hurt. She stood there with a baffling look on her face.

CHAPTER XX

IT WAS while she was returning home from Reverend Berry's class one evening that Howard Cannon ran into her. She was outside of the church waiting to catch a taxi. A black Cadillac drove past, suddenly braked to a stop, then started backing toward her. She watched the white back-up lights with annoyance, in no mood to be bothered with motorists who tried to pick up girls on the street.

The Cadillac stopped beside her before she realized it was Howard Cannon. He leaned over to the window nearest her, his shock of white hair prominent in the night.

"Hello, Alice."

"Oh, hello, Mr. Cannon. I didn't know it was you."

He laughed pleasantly. "It's me, all right. Can I take you some place?"

"Well—I was just going home."

"Okay. Get in."

He held the door open for her, and she got in and closed the door. He started the car moving.

She said, "I didn't know who it was until you spoke."

"What are you doing in this neighborhood?" he asked.

"Why, I—" She hesitated, thinking fast. Then she said, "I belong to that church back there. That's the church I go to."

For a while he didn't say anything. He drove swiftly, smoothly, handling the big car with a skill seldom seen in one as old as he. She watched him, waiting for him to speak, wondering what he would say about the church. But he said nothing.

"You're a good driver," she said when she could stand the silence no longer.

"I do all my driving. I like to drive—never had a chauffeur in my life." He looked at her. "Drunk or sober," he said, "I drive my own car."

She said, "I should think you'd be afraid to drive when you've been drinking. Isn't it dangerous?"

"Never had an accident in my life. And I've lived a few years, too."

He's bragging, she thought. All the time before she had never known him to brag about anything. Again he looked at her.

"That was a Negro church you just left," he said.

He didn't ask her—he told her. She thought rapidly, knowing that what she said now would mean a lot.

She said, "Yes—African Methodist."

"How did you get mixed up with it?"

She said, a little defiantly, "What's the difference?"

"No difference. I never go to any of them. If I did go to church, one would be about as good as another to me."

"I don't know," she said. "I just happened to go there one Sunday, and everybody was so friendly. I went a few more times, then one Sunday I just joined."

He said, "Duke Bolden belonged there."

"I know. They told me about it after I joined."

"I guess it's all right," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—you're white, and a colored church—"

She flared. "I don't see where that's any of your business."

He laughed. "I know. What you do after working hours is your own business. What you do during working hours is mine."

"That's right," she said. She was very angry.

He didn't say anything. He kept the car moving, heading through traffic, going nowhere in particular. She sat silently beside him, thinking that she had ruined everything with her foolish temper. Perhaps he might even fire her.

At last he said, "You know why I should have known about the colored church, Alice. You know why I ought to know everything about you. You know why it's my business what you do on the job and off the job, don't you?"

She said nothing. He drove with one hand, placing the other on her lap. She waited, knowing that everything was at stake now. She had planned it this way; she had planned to be in control when it came. And here it was.

"You know about my drinking," he went on. "You couldn't help knowing, the way they talk around the office. And you know why I stopped drinking and going on benders when you came to work for me." The fingers on her lap caught at her thigh, dug deeply in the flesh. "You know, Alice. You do know, don't you?"

She said in a very low voice, "Yes, I know, Mr. Cannon. I guess I've known for a long time."

He took his hand away from her lap and put it on the wheel. When he spoke his voice trembled. "Alice, you've got to listen to me. I'm an old man—over sixty. You're a kid. But I'm a man, and I'm lonely." By now he was rushing. "I don't know how I got along before you came, Alice. I guess that's why I drank so much. But you came along, and I stopped drinking. I love you, Alice! By God, I love you!"

She put her hand on his shoulder. She moved close to him.

"Mr. Cannon."

He said nothing.

She said, "I don't know you, Mr. Cannon. I don't know what you're like outside the office. I don't know what you're like when you get drunk."

"You don't need to know, Alice. I haven't been drunk since you came."

"But I want to know, Mr. Cannon. I want to see you drunk—I—I even want to get drunk with you."

He stared at her. "By God!" he said. "By God!" Then he stopped the car, backed into a driveway, and turned around.

"By God!" he cried. "Damned if I don't believe you're right. Before this thing goes any further the two of us ought to get roaring drunk. After that we'll know how we feel."

She smiled to herself. She watched as he drove swiftly, surely, heading into town. At the hotel the doorman opened the door and let them out, and he looked at her curiously. But he said nothing as they went into the hotel, leaving the black Cadillac with the doorman.

He was Mr. Cannon, and well known, and everything was very discreet. The Italian bellhop, Phil, took them up to their room, and he looked at her often and seemed puzzled. But he let them in and opened the door to the bath and raised windows.

"All right, boy," Howard Cannon said. "Now you know what to bring us."

"Yes, sir," the boy said soberly.

"You ought to know," Howard Cannon chuckled. "By God, he's the best damned bellhop in the world."

Alice Caldwell smiled, and her eyes were very deep.

They stayed there for four days. And sometime during those four wild days she became Mrs. Howard Cannon.

CHAPTER XXI

AS ALWAYS BEFORE, he came out of it for a while, and he was clearheaded. He came out it feeling weak and roaring

hungry; as always, his first thought was food. He was hungry as a horse.

Everything was as always.

But no, not everything. For on the pillow next to his was a darkish-brown head of hair and the elongated face of a sleeping woman. For a moment he lay there and listened to the light, unmusical way in which she breathed. It was something that he did not want. It was something he did not understand.

He lay there, thinking. At first, it was a blank, stretching back for days—he knew not how many—but even then, he knew there had been something different about this bender. This woman was the difference. Alice Caldwell, whom he thought he loved and whom he thought—as the blank gradually filled in—he had married.

He got up from the bed, careful not to disturb the sleeping girl—*woman*, he insisted to himself. He walked to the dresser, as though he knew it was there to be found, and it was. His fingers picked up the stiff parchment and he read it, and it told him what his memory had already hinted. The woman in his bed was his wife.

He started dressing. But already, with a sinking feeling, he knew it was no good. He didn't blame her. It was his fault. He had confused for love the suddenly awakened lusts of an old man. He had allowed a young girl's—*woman's*, he insisted again, gently, to himself—friendliness to make him believe in things that could never be.

For that was the sad truth. Howard Cannon knew he could become husband to no woman.

In the months that followed he tried. In his mind he tried to conjure up all the romantic and violent intimacy, but it just didn't work. He could feel nothing for the girl he had married. She was just there in his house, a girl who used to be his secretary and who now had his name.

At first he had thought he would have the marriage annulled. He had been drunk, he hadn't known what he was doing. He could prove it by the Italian bellhop, Phil. Or he

might have bought her off, might have given her money and told her to go away and stay away. God knew he had enough money to do that.

Yet he had no heart for arranging a separation. Once she understood that he had no feeling for her, she never bothered him. She was just there in his house. After a while he came to expect her there. He was a lonely old man, and she quickly became a habit to him. For she was still quiet and efficient; she quickly learned what he liked and disliked around the house, and often she went out of her way to do little things to please him.

He bought her an eggshell blue Packard as a present, and he gave her a generous allowance. He supposed it was more than enough, for she never asked him for money. He never knew how much of the money she spent or saved, he never talked with her about financial matters.

But once again he went on his wild drinking sprees. At times he drove by instinct, not knowing what he was doing. At other times he went up to the hotel, remaining there for weeks at a time in a stupor.

CHAPTER XXII

DUKE BOLDEN sat before the parole board hearing. He looked at the board members, and he thought: They are friends. They are like the Committee on Advancement when I was a Scout. They want me to pass, but they can't make me pass. I have to pass on my own.

"What is your name?"

"Duke Bolden."

"How old are you, Duke?"

"Twenty-four."

One of the members of the parole board leaned forward, smiled. "Duke," he said, "we'd like to consider paroling you, but we'll have to ask you some questions. Okay?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the first place, Duke, we've talked with your church

members back home, and we've talked with Mr. Cannon, the man who sent you to University. They want you back home. Mr. Cannon is willing to give you the job you used to hold in the summer, and your minister is willing to serve as a consultant to your parole officer if you are released. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Before you came here, Duke, you used to live at the 'Y,' didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

The man said, "If we recommend you for parole, you won't be living at the 'Y'. But your church would be able to find you an apartment in a nice neighborhood. We'd expect you to live there."

He nodded.

Now another man spoke. "You have no parents, Duke?"

"No, sir."

"No relative at all?"

"I don't know of any."

He didn't tell them how he had counted the days until he would be eligible for parole. Day by day, hour by hour. He didn't tell them how hard it was to keep out of trouble in prison, how the inmates had played cruel jokes on him. Nor did he tell them how the guards had shoved him around, how he had taken it, hating their guts all the while.

But he had learned from the start that if he ever expected to get time off he had to keep his lips buttoned up. He kept quiet, he got no bad conduct reports. He was never bitter or sullen and he stayed out of solitary. He heard other inmates cursing the guards, but he kept his mouth shut.

After a few months he was transferred to the library, and he was still there when he came up for parole.

Now he sat before three men from the parole board at a long table; they sat on the opposite side of the table facing him, and a prison guard stood nearby, watching him. He tried to forget about the guard and concentrate on the three men. He was polite and cooperative, but he did not beg. He

answered all the questions they asked him. Yes, he said, he killed the coach, but he was drunk. No, he had never had a drink before. If he was paroled, he would never take a drink again. He would never frequent saloons or associate with bad women.

The three men leaned forward, taking turns asking questions. They were polite and interested and kind. They talked to him about University and his high-school and college football days.

"Frankly, Duke," one of them said, "we think you slipped up, that's all. We don't believe you were a bad boy. You see, we've studied your background, and we believe you'll make good if we parole you. Do you think you could keep out of trouble?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you be willing to take every possible step to keep out of trouble?"

"Yes, sir."

"I guess that's about all, Duke."

"Thank you, sir."

He turned and walked out of the door ahead of the prison guard.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SUN SHONE BRIGHT over the African Methodist Church that Sunday morning. The children came noisily to Sunday School, shouting, laughing, playing. The teachers moved about, admonishing them and separating them into classes.

Later on the older ones came on for church, and they moved about talking. For the last few weeks they had been raising money; every club, every organization in the church had made a contribution. Day after day workers had gone out among the members asking for donations. Busiest among all these had been two young women—Alice Caldwell Cannon and Rida Malloy. They had worked tirelessly, had gone from house to house.

For Duke Bolden was coming home.

"You cannot give him cash money," the parole officer had told them. "He will have to earn his own money. He will have to get a job and keep one."

"But what about a place to stay?" Rida had asked. "He's coming out, and he has no place to stay. Can't we get him a place? Can't we fix a place up for him?"

"All right. You can do that. But after that you let him shift for himself. We don't want you pampering him. We don't want you making a hero out of him. He's just a fellow who committed a crime, and we're giving him another chance. You can't make good for him—he has to do it for himself."

"What about a car?" Alice had asked. "He'll be doing construction work, and most of his jobs will be out of town. He'll need a car to go to and from work."

"Has he got money enough to buy a car?"

"No."

"Parolees aren't allowed to buy anything on credit. And he hasn't even received permission to operate an automobile yet."

"But you can't tie his hands," Alice had cried. "My husband—Mr. Cannon—will give him a job. But what can he do with that kind of job without a car?"

"I tell you we can't allow parolees to buy a car on credit."

"All right," Alice said. "Then why can't we get him a car?"

"It's not wise. Look—he's not a hero coming home from war or something. He's not even a football player any more. He's just a prisoner being let out before his time is up."

But they had argued and pleaded, and in the end it was agreed that Duke Bolden could have the car. The money raised by the church people was not nearly enough to cover all the things that Duke Bolden needed. When the money gave out, Alice quietly wrote checks for the rest. She saw to it that he had the clothes that he needed, saw to it that

the apartment was furnished. It was she who saw to it that a telephone was installed in his name.

And when everything was done, she had bought a portable record player for him. Then she had bought all the kinds of records he had liked in school.

Now it was Sunday morning, and Duke had come out of prison the day before. And so the people gathered at the African Methodist Church and talked, their hearts a mixture of gladness and regret. But all the things they had expected of him, all the accomplishments they had hoped he would make, would never come about. They regretted that in one moment of anger he had thrown away so much.

They went into the church, and the organ played its soft music, and quiet came over the congregation.

And while the organ played Duke came into church. As before he stood tall and athletic, his shoulders big and his stomach flat. An usher moved quietly before him, taking him to a pew on the right side and halfway down the aisle. He walked long-legged behind the usher, his eyes ahead of him. They looked at him, remembering his tall, medium good looks. He was wearing a dark blue suit with a white shirt and a dark tie. Some of them, after one good look, turned their eyes back to the pulpit. Others whispered among themselves.

The order of service went on uninterrupted. The choirs sang their songs, and the Steward raised his voice in prayer. The minister preached his sermon, not once directing it at Duke Bolden. Not once did he refer to the return of the prodigal, not once did he speak of lost sheep returning to the fold. Wisely and mercifully he preached about other things.

When service was over Duke Bolden stood and made his way up to the edge of the pulpit, his face calm, his manner quiet. He held his hand out, and the minister took it.

"Hello, Reverend Berry," he said in a quiet voice.

"Hello, son. I'm glad to see you back in church."

"I'm glad to be back, Reverend."

The members started gathering around the two. They looked at Duke, trying to see what he was like now, searching for any change in his looks, or manner. They waited for a chance to speak to him. The minister, seeing this, let the boy's hand go.

"Hello, Duke, boy! Remember me?"

"Hello, Mrs. Jones."

They crowded in on him then, shaking his hand. Some of the older members, who had hoped great hopes for him once, now spoke to him with trembling lips. But they kept everything light as they welcomed him back; no one admonished him, no one mentioned the thing that he had done.

And all the while two young women stood apart from the crowd, watching. One was white and one was colored. And, although they stood apart from the crowd, they were not standing together. Between them were fifteen or twenty feet of church aisle.

Rida kept her eyes on Duke's tall figure, and there was something alive and naked and movingly tender in her eyes. She stood there, the strap of her pocketbook clutched tightly in both her hands, never once taking her eyes away from him as he spoke to all the members of the church.

Still farther back stood Alice. She stood straight, her feet apart, and watched Rida and Duke. Her face looked thinner, more elongated, her cheeks more sunken. She watched, and there was something dangerous in her eyes.

When most of the crowd had greeted Duke, and many of them were moving away, Rida Malloy walked down the aisle.

"Hello, Duke," she said, her voice even.

"Hello, Rida." His voice was very low and gentle.

For a moment the two stood looking at each other. The others, remembering how it had been before Duke went to prison, quietly moved away, leaving them alone before the altar and the pulpit.

Alice stood where she was, watching them.

"How's everything, Rida?" His eyes never left her face.

"All right."

Duke and Rida watched each other's eyes, as if all communication could be done with the eyes, not the mouth.

"How've you been, Duke?"

"All right."

At last she put her hand on his arm.

"Duke," she said, her voice a whisper. "I'm glad you're back. I'm glad—glad!"

He said, "All right, Rida."

And then Alice walked down to where they stood. She came indifferently, walking with long, lazy strides.

"Hello, Duke," she said. "Remember me?"

He looked at her steadily. His face was passive, and she noticed that the hangdog expression did not come into his eyes.

He said, "Hello."

Rida Malloy was watching the two of them closely. She said, "Then you do remember her, Duke?"

"Sure," he said. "Alice. I remember her."

"I'm married now, Duke," Alice said.

"I know." There was no flicker of interest, no show of emotion about him. His face was inscrutable.

"I—I belong to this church now."

"You do?"

Alice nodded; now it was Rida Malloy who watched them closely. Once her brows knitted in puzzlement, as if she sensed that here was something unusual, as if she had an inkling of the undercurrent going on between the two.

Rida said, "I guess I'll be going home."

"How's your mother?" Duke asked.

"She died last spring."

"I'm sorry," Duke said.

"That's all right."

"You still—living the same place?"

"Yes."

"I'll take you home."

"All right."

Duke looked at Alice. "Well, good-by, Alice."

"Good-by, Duke."

Rida said, "Good-by."

"See you, Rida."

The two walked along the aisle toward the front door. The tall white girl stood in the aisle near the altar and the pulpit, watching them. Her hands were stuck deep into the pockets of her grey dress suit, her feet apart.

And Alice Caldwell swore to herself that she would have this boy. She wanted Duke Bolden, wanted him as she had never before wanted anything else in the world. Neither Rida nor Howard Cannon would stop her; nothing would stop her.

She knew she didn't love Duke Bolden. She didn't love him because she couldn't love him, or anybody. But she had to have him. He was a challenge to her, stirring her blood, heating her flesh, making her ache until she'd have him in her arms, have him as she must.

It was the reason, the culmination of over two years of waiting. She had sacrificed, those two years. It was not strange that she did not think of Duke's sacrifice, or that his sacrifice was for her. All she thought about was herself. She had given up time for Duke Bolden. She had gone to church for him. She had taken a job for him. Yes, she had even married for him.

And now she would exact her payment for all these sacrifices. She would have Duke Bolden.

She watched Duke and Rida walk out of the church, hand in hand, and her heart was filled nearly to bursting with what she was going to do.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUNDAY NIGHT, when she left the house which she now called home, the breeze was blowing from the house down the crooked asphalt road toward the highway which led into town. She got into the blue Packard and drove away from the house.

Howard Cannon owned a rambling country home about

four miles out of town: it was built high up on a hill about three-quarters of a mile from the highway. The asphalt road which ran its winding way all the way from the house down to the highway was a private road: it was narrow and tree-lined, and it ended in an almost sheer drop from the hill into the highway. Tree-lined as it was, it constituted a blind entrance into the highway where the zooming trucks went speeding to and from town. It was a treacherous, dangerous entrance, and many had predicted that some day Howard Cannon would shoot out from the little road into the highway right into an onrushing truck picking up speed from town. As if anticipating this, the highway department had placed signs above and below the asphalt road, warning that a side road was near.

And in all his years, Howard Cannon drove in and out of that narrow side road without an accident.

Alice drove all the way down to the highway, braking the blue Packard frequently, checking its speed against the sharp descent. When she got to the highway she brought the car to a full stop. The big headlights from the trucks loomed bright in the night: in the scant four miles from town they had picked up terrific speed. They used the right lane of the highway, and passenger cars sped along on the left lanes. On the outer side of the highway, heading into town, sped other passenger cars and trucks. Alice waited for almost two minutes at the highway entrance before there was a break in the heavy traffic.

She pulled rapidly into the highway, turned left, and headed for town. She drove swiftly, handling the Packard easily, now and then glancing into the rear-view mirror to see what traffic was behind her. She knew a great deal about cars, and she was a good driver.

She reached town, turned right into the main street and drove steadily until she passed city hall. At the next intersection she turned right again, into a poorly lighted street. She drove rapidly, braking the Packard only slightly at each intersection.

At last she reached a street with one or two apartment houses and a great number of rambling frame buildings. Turning left on this street, she drove the car halfway down the block and parked two houses away from an apartment building. She sat still in the car for a while, watching. Now and then a shadowy figure appeared and vanished as lone persons went up or down the street. There was no noise save the loneliness of their steps.

She got out of the car and locked the door, then walked rapidly to the apartment building. She pulled hard on the outer door, swinging it open and stepping quickly into the lobby as if she didn't want to be seen. Without pause she moved to the stairway, running up the steps, then walking down the hallway with a key in her hand. She stopped at a door, searched for the keyhole in the darkened hall, and unlocked the door.

The door opened to a wide rectangle of light. She went inside, then closed the door and stood leaning against it. She stood there, smiling.

Duke Bolden, in dark-blue trousers and a white shirt open at the collar, sat in a straight chair near the davenport. The portable record player was on a stand in the corner, and a record was playing.

For a moment he sat regarding her gravely.

He said, "Hello, Alice."

She left the door and walked to the davenport and sat down, stretching her legs out straight before her.

"Well," she said mockingly, "aren't you surprised to see me?"

He said, "How did you get the key?"

"I had it made. I've had it since we first got this place for you."

They sat there looking at each other. She smiled and he did not smile in return. She watched his face and eyes, seeing none of the old worship in them that had been there when he was at University.

"You've changed, Duke," she said.

He shrugged.

"Haven't you got any better records than that?" she asked.

"I guess so."

"Oh, God!" she said. She got up and went to the record player and stopped it. Turning to the stack of records, she went rapidly through them until she found what she wanted.

She looked at Duke and smiled. "I want you to listen to this one," she said. "I want you to really listen to it."

She put it on the turntable and started the record player again. She fumbled in her pocketbook and fished out a cigarette and lighted it. She walked over to where Duke sat, the cigarette dangling from her mouth. Her eyes were cool and steady as she looked down upon him.

"Listen to it, Duke," she said. "Damn you, listen to it!"

He said nothing. From the record player came King Cole's smooth voice.

She stood over him and looked down upon him. "Remember it?" she said huskily. "Remember it, Duke?"

"Why did you come here, Alice?"

"Well, damn your nerves!" she said. "Why do you think I came here? Why do you think I left the house and drove all the way to town just to see you? Why—why?"

He came up suddenly, catching her by both her arms. "You're married, see?" he said. "You're married, understand? I want you to stay away from me."

She turned away from him abruptly, went back to the davenport and sat down. She sucked smoke from the cigarette into her lungs and blew the smoke upward.

The voice came smooth and easy from the record.

She spoke in a low, husky voice. "Remember, Duke? Remember the dances at University, when they used to play that and we used to dance? Remember that?"

Duke went to the chair and sat down, not answering her.

"Poor Duke," Alice said. "You sure don't know what to do now, do you? You're all mixed up, Duke. But take it easy, take it easy and relax."

The record wound its way to the end. Alice got up and went to the record player and started it back at the beginning.

"Come on, Duke," she said. "Come on, let's dance. Let's dance the way we used to at University."

"I don't want to."

"Aw, come on. I want to dance, Duke. I came all the way to town to dance with you. Don't be like that."

"Listen," he said, "will you let me alone? Will you get out of here and let me alone? You're married, see? You married Mr. Cannon, and I won't have anything to do with you."

Alice got up off the lounge and stood straight, her eyes angry.

"I didn't have to do it, Duke. I could have gone away and let you rot in that damned place. I could have gone, and you couldn't do a thing about it." She motioned about with her hand, waving it over the place. "Where do you think all this came from, Duke? This apartment, this furniture, the car—where do you think they came from?"

"The church—"

She laughed harshly. "Don't you believe it, Duke. Don't you believe one goddam word of it. Sure they gave their pennies. But what did it amount to?" She leaned forward. "I bought all this—I paid for all this with checks. And I paid for the car—I sent them a check for the whole thing."

She was silent, and the record player warbled. Duke sat in the chair, his chin in the palms of his hands, his elbows on his thighs. She bent down over him, putting her hands on him, pleading.

"Listen to me, Duke. We know each other—understand each other. You've done things for me, and I've done things for you. You went to jail for me. I know you did. But I married a drunken old man for you. I know you made a sacrifice, but I did too. Why do you have to act like this now? Why—why?" She clutched at him, pulling him up from the chair. "Don't treat me like that, Duke. Treat me like I'm a woman."

Treat me like you like me—like I'm the same girl you used to like at University."

She clutched him and started to cry. Her hands gripped his big shoulders. He's still big and strong, she thought. He is as strong as he ever was. But he's different. There's something cold about him. Before he was warm and soft. Now he's hard. It must be something they did to him in prison—he must be twisted. He must hate me.

"Duke," she sobbed. "Duke—Duke!"

He let her hold him, and he stood there, still and cold as a stone. She clung to him and pressed herself to him and wept. And she kept thinking that now she meant it all, he didn't believe her—he stood there as though she was a foolish kid.

And then, just as she was about to turn away in despair, something seemed to shake in him—it shook him violently, and she felt it, and it was like a storm shaking the side of a house or something. He moaned, and it was like something broke inside him, and he picked her up and carried her to the davenport.

"Duke," she cried. "Duke—Duke!"

She put her arms around him and pulled his head down to her, feeling his whole body jerk in the depth of his emotion. And she heard the record player warbling, but it was not the Calypso Blues.

She heard the record player warbling, but she didn't care what it was playing.

And out in the street the bird's egg blue of her Packard shone in the faint street light until the first streaks of dawn washed over the horizon.

CHAPTER XXV

THE STRUCTURAL STEEL rose eight stories high. Block after block of steel, all grouped into buildings, each building exact-

ly like all the other buildings. Low rent housing projects going up, hundreds and hundreds of units. At every housing unit the sign stood high: THE CANNON CONSTRUCTION COMPANY. OFFICES IN ALL PRINCIPAL CITIES.

Duke Bolden left his new Plymouth and walked across the street toward the long row of shanties, carrying a new pair of brown overalls under his arm. Others, parked as he was, joined him, moving in a body toward the row of shanties marked laborers, some into shanties marked ironworkers, others carpenters, plumbers, steamfitters, bricklayers, and cement finishers. There were shanties for engineers, electricians, and many others.

Duke Bolden went to the low shack marked: Timekeeper. At the window of this shack was a sign which said: Mr. O'Rourke. A man stood at the window, and Duke went there.

"Mr. Cannon sent me," he said. "He told me to tell you to start me to work this morning."

For a moment O'Rourke studied him. He was a slender man with a thin face and eyeglasses.

"What doing?" he asked.

"Laborer."

"Your name Bolden?"

"Yes."

"The union cleared you?"

"Mr. Cannon told me to tell the Shop Steward he'd take care of it."

"You'd better go see the Shop Steward," O'Rourke said. "He'll be in the laborer's shanty. He'll take you to your foreman."

"What's the Shop Steward's name?"

"Jim," O'Rourke told him.

He found Jim in the shanty. "The timekeeper told me to see you," he said.

"Your name Bolden?"

"Yes."

"All right. Old man Cannon took care of your union book

for you. The delegate has it, but you'll get it in a day or two. You'll be working in concrete. You know how to roll a Georgia buggy, don't you?"

"I used to know."

The Shop Steward grinned. "They still do it the same way. It's like making love—it never changes."

The Shop Steward looked at Duke, grinning. Duke's face remained deadpan. The grin wiped off the Shop Steward's face.

"You'll be working for a fellow named York," the Shop Steward said. "Know him?"

"No."

"I'll take you to him."

Duke followed him out of the shanty, where men were dressing in their work clothes, and down three or four doors where a shanty was marked: Foremen. In this shanty men were lounging about, talking. They looked at the two as they entered.

Jim said, "York."

"What?"

"I brought you a man."

York weighed over two hundred and stood five feet six or seven. He was wearing clean blue overalls, and he had a fleshy face. The face was red and clean shaven, and when he spoke his voice was low and rumbling.

"Christ," he said, "I never ordered no man. I got too many men now. What am I gonna do with another man."

"The Old Man sent him," Jim said. "Straight from the head office. He's to go in your gang, and he's to stay there. The Old Man said so."

York looked at Duke closely. And at once he didn't like him. He didn't like his quiet good looks, his impassive face, set so still it seemed drained of emotion. There was a reserve and a strength here that York did not understand. And what York did not understand, he did not like.

But more than that, York, who was a foreman himself, did

not like what he called, "company men." The Old Man had sent the new man, straight from the front office. Maybe he was a spy; maybe he was a young snot being trained for his, York's job. They never hired Negroes as foremen, never before this, but then the front office never sent new men when there was no need for new men. He narrowed his eyes and stared at Duke, and he thought: "Boy, I don't like you. I hate your guts."

He looked away from Duke as though he were not there. "All right," he said to Jim. "But he's got to work, I don't care who sent him. Christ. I got a job to do, and I can't be bothered with no pets."

"What the hell you want from me?" Jim said. "I'm only the Shop Steward. My delegate says put him on, and that's all I care."

All this time Duke had not spoken.

"You got to roll a buggy, boy," York said. "What's your name anyway?"

"Bolden."

"All right. Go in the shanty and put your clothes on. And remember—you got to work like the rest of them."

Duke turned and walked out without a word. In the laborers' shanty he dressed without a word; when the whistle blew he went out with the others.

It all came back to him now. Seven hours of steady motion. That's what Howard Cannon required of all his men, favorites or not. All the big buildings going up, all the housing jobs, all the high buildings, all the factories—all built because you worked at top speed. Howard Cannon hired you to work for thirty-five hours each week, and in those thirty-five hours he got fifty hours work out of you.

He hired the laborers to dig the ground. He hired them to lift the big timbers, to swing the sledge hammers, to roll the full concrete buggies, to do everything that was called common labor. And all the laborers he hired were Negroes. He hired them and told them that they were the backbone of

the building industry. He told them that they were stronger and better and could do more than white laborers, and the old laborers believed him and strained their guts to prove what he said.

But the young Negro laborers laughed at the old ones, saying all any laborer needed was a strong back and a weak mind. The young ones wouldn't work as hard as the old ones did. Thus, through his foremen, Howard Cannon kept the old laborers and fired the young ones as fast as the union would let them.

Duke went with the men to the foreman, who led them high above to the floor where concrete was being poured. Far below a big crane with long steel boom and wire cables raised the concrete ever upward, emptying it into a big hopper. The laborers lined up behind the hopper, filling their buggies with concrete, racing with it to where the cement finishers stood. You were only a laborer—you had to run. For seven hours you ran, while the carpenters nailed their nails, the ironworkers tied their steel, and the bricklayers laid their brick. Everybody worked, but the laborer worked hardest.

He worked hardest, and he was paid the least.

And then when he was old, when he couldn't run any more, when his feet and legs and back gave out on him, contractors eased him off the job, deftly turning him out to eke any kind of existence he could manage.

Duke Bolden lined up with the others. The foreman, York, stood beside the hopper, watching the way the men came up to it, watching how much concrete they emptied into the buggies, seeing how swiftly they got away from the hopper and ran all the way down the runways to the spreaders.

That was the way laborers worked. That was the way buildings and cities sprang up, the way Howard Cannon made his millions, the reason he had offices in all principal cities.

That was the way Negroes held their jobs in the building industry.

The Negroes never asked about the justice of it—they just ran. Out there in the world—in factories, on other jobs—they had to work just as hard, and they got paid less. If they complained they were laid off and other Negroes stood ready to take their places. They were afraid of their jobs, they tried to work just a little harder and run just a little faster than the next man. So the foreman would like them a little better, so he would keep them a few days longer. The carpenters didn't run that way. The bricklayers didn't run, nor the ironworkers, nor the cement finishers. But those were skilled men, while they were just laborers.

The backbone of the building industry.

And there were always men like York. White men, whose one job was to keep them running, to crack the whip, to get the last ounce from them. As long as he did that he remained foreman. As long as he kept them running, he could stand around and keep his blue overalls clean.

Duke kept his place in line. Men ran like wild horses, and he ran with them. An endless line of concrete trucks stood below, waiting for the crane to heave up their loads. The men ran, and sweat drenched their armpits and backs; sweat wet their buttocks as though they had sat down in a pool of water, and it wet their thighs and dripped down into their shoes. Men pulled off their wet shirts and hung them out; the hard, hot sun shone down upon the salty sweat of the shirts, drying them and leaving the salt showing white in the shirts.

The men rolled, and York watched them. He watched Duke most of all. -

"I want a day's work out of you, Bolden," he said.

Duke gave him a day's work. He was young and strong, and he knew how to roll a buggy. He rolled it up to the hopper and filled it full; he spun the buggy around, instead of backing it slowly away. He gave the buggy a good start down the incline, so that, after a while, it went of its own momentum. When he got to the spreaders he dumped, hard

and fast, then spun the buggy around and was on his way back to the hopper.

York watched, and he was pleased. At noon he said to the Shop Steward, "That new boy you brought me, he's all right. He's strong and fast. He's better than any young fellow I've seen in a long time. Only thing—he's too quiet for a colored boy."

"He ever laugh or joke?" the Shop Steward asked.

"No—he never says a word."

"You better be careful how you talk to him," the Shop Steward said. "Don't yell at him or curse at him the way you do the others."

"Why not?" York asked.

"He just got out of prison. He went up for killing a man." Then the Shop Steward looked at York and grinned. "The man he killed was white, too," he added.

After that the foreman York had little to say to Duke, and Duke never spoke to the foreman.

But the foreman watched Duke all the time. In addition to hating Duke, York now knew that the tall boy worried him. It was York's job to know his men, to know their nature, to find out what they thought. But how could he find out what a man thought when he wouldn't talk?

York was resourceful. He started asking questions. Why did the Old Man force the union to hire a parolee? Who got the boy out of prison in the first place? In no time at all he learned about Duke's football career and how it came to a tragic end at University. He talked with the timekeeper, he talked with the field superintendent, and he talked with the engineers whenever they came on the job from the main office.

He got some strange news, and he put it all together. Little by little he got the news, but when he put it all together, it fitted. He found how a young girl had walked into the office and became Howard Cannon's personal secretary. Later, to everybody's surprise, he had married her.

Little by little he pieced things together.

Then, when he learned that the Old Man's wife had gone to University together with Duke Bolden and that the two worshiped in the same church, the foreman York frowned thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XXVI

ALICE SAT on the davenport, singing with Nat Cole's record. Duke lay stretched out, his head in her lap, staring straight up into space.

"Duke."

"What?"

"Why you tired? Do you have to work all that hard?"

"Tired."

"Why you so quiet, Duke?"

"Yes."

"No you don't. Nobody will fire you, Duke. The Old Man wouldn't let them fire you."

"York would fire anybody who didn't work hard."

"He'd better not!" she snapped.

"You tell him. You tell him he'd better not fire a man. I can't get fired, Alice. I'm on parole, and if I get fired, you know what that means. I can't cause any trouble on the job because Mr. Cannon would hear about it before the end of the day. And the parole officer is all the time coming around asking me how I'm getting along on the job and how I'm getting along at church. And York just stands around in his clean blue overalls and watches us running. And I can't say a word."

"Poor Duke," she said in his ear.

"I can't ever say anything. At University I had to take it and not say anything. In prison I had to take it and keep my mouth shut. Now I still got to keep my mouth shut. And it's not right the way we have to run all the time."

All the casualness left her face now. She got up and went to the record player, removing the Nat Cole records and loading the turntable with folk songs by Burl Ives.

When she spoke her voice was unhurried. "What's the easiest job out there, Duke?"

"Shop Steward. He don't have to do anything but look out for the men."

"Can't you be Shop Steward?"

"No. The union makes Shop Stewards."

"What's the next easiest job?"

"Foreman, I guess."

"How many foremen they got on the job?"

"Gee, I wouldn't know. Plenty of them. Concrete foremen, digging foremen, backfilling foremen, grading foremen, masons' tenders' foremen, lumber-cleaning foremen—all kinds of laborers' foremen."

"Couldn't you be a foreman?"

"They like for their foremen to be white."

"Who likes them to be white?"

"Mr. Cannon."

"Maybe he might change his mind if I asked," she said.

"Look, here," he said. "I don't like that. You can't go asking him to do too many things for me. Mr. Cannon's not a fool, and he'll soon start thinking things."

"He stays too drunk to think anything," she said, her voice scornful.

"I know what he's like when he's sober. I've known him all my life."

"Oh, hell," she said. "I'm just his wife—I can't ask him to do a damned thing. Like hell! Well, he's going to make you foreman, see!"

Duke rolled over and sat up. "That's another thing, Alice. You're his wife. Mr. Cannon's been good to me. I don't think you ought to come here so much. You just come here and open the door and walk in. You ought not to do it."

"I don't see why," Alice said. "He's always in that hotel

drunk, and there's nothing else for me to do. I hate that house, Duke. He's got those old servants around there, and they boss everything. I can't do one goddam thing around there the way I want to. They don't even like it when I play records all the time. I like being here better than there any day."

"Yeah, but somebody might find out. I got a parole officer, and he's been here twice. Suppose he came here and found you here?"

She laughed. "That's easy. Don't let anybody in as long as I'm here."

"But suppose he's already here and you come busting in like you always do. You come unlocking the door with your own key and everything. What'll I say then?"

"Oh, nuts! All right, I'll call you up before I come up after this. That make you feel better?"

He said slowly, "I don't know. I'm not going on like this much longer—you and me. Something's bound to happen. I've got to stay in this town and keep out of trouble. If we keep on like this there'll be trouble. I know it."

She got up from the davenport, suddenly angry.

"What are you complaining about?" she demanded. "Haven't I done everything I could? Haven't I kept every promise I made to you? What is it that you could want—that I could give you—and haven't?"

He said evenly, "You're Mr. Cannon's wife."

"Oh, God! Oh, brother!"

"You didn't have to marry him, Alice."

She sat down. "No," she said. "No, I didn't. I could've gone on working in the office. I could've gone on working for peanuts. Then, when you got out, you would've started working for peanuts too. Then, before you knew it you'd be hating me, and I'd be hating you."

"I would've made out."

She jerked in her breath sharply. "I bet you would. You

still would have your school teacher, wouldn't you? You'd have her to fall back on. You'd still have your pure little girl who always went to church and never did anything wrong. You'd have her because she went to church and taught school and waited for you to get out. Remember that, Duke. She *waited* for you to get out. I married the Old Man and got you out."

He said, "You shut up." His voice was tense.

She laughed. "You take her to church every Sunday morning. I go alone. You sit with her in church, and you stand around and talk with her after service. I sit alone, and the best I get from you is hello. You take her home and sit around looking at television, while I have to go to that god-dam house. She can see you when she pleases, but I have to come sneaking up here to see you. You've got a nice little school teacher who goes to your own church for a hole card, but all I've got is a drunken old rich man for a husband."

Duke sat very still. Alice leaned over, putting her hands on his thighs.

"Duke, baby," she said softly, "it's not easy on me. I'm getting sick of it. Sometimes I want to burn down that house. Sometimes I wish the Old Man would die. I wish his heart would stop on him. Sometimes, when he leaves the house with his drunken driving, I wish he would shoot out into the highway, and—and—"

He said, "Don't say it, Alice. Don't you say it!"

"Duke," she said. "Oh, Duke! God, Duke. I don't know what to do now."

She moved up against Duke, clinging to him, her head up against his chest.

The record player was on, Burl Ives sang:

There was a lady from the town,
 Low, so low, so lonely,
 She walked her up, and she walked her down,
 Down by the greenwood sidey,

First she leaned upon an oak—
First it bent, and then it broke —

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SHOP STEWARD went into the foremen's shanty.

"Hello, boys," he said.

"Hello, Jim."

"How's it going, fellas?"

The Shop Steward singled York out.

"How you getting along with the men, York?"

He shrugged his shoulders, looking short and red-faced and fat in the early morning heat. His blue overalls and blue, short-sleeved shirt were remarkably clean.

"I'm making out," he said.

"Can you make out with one man less, York?"

"Which one?"

"Bolden. We're making a foreman out of the boy."

There was a silence then. The foremen looked at one another, then all of them looked at the Shop Steward.

At last one of them spoke. "Since when did they start making colored foremen? They never did it before."

"Times have changed, brother," the Shop Steward said.

Then York exploded. "That bastard! And he's nothing but a convict—a paroled convict."

"Jesus," the Shop Steward said angrily. "Don't blame me, for Christ's sake. The orders came down from the Old Man, and the delegate okayed them. You know how the Old Man and the delegate work. The Old Man won't buck the union as long as the union don't buck him."

Another foreman spoke. "I don't give a damn. They never made a foreman that way before. That's not the way I got my job, and that's not the way the rest of us got theirs."

"All right," the Shop Steward said wearily. "What can

you do? We're giving Bolden a lumber-cleaning gang. You know and I know he can handle the job. He's got a union book the same as you and me, and I'm supposed to look out for all union men."

"Well—I say it ain't right," York said.

"Why not, York? The boy's a good worker—you've said that yourself. He's been to college, which is more than you've ever done. Hell, he's smarter than any of the rest of us out here, and you know it. If he wasn't colored, he'd be an engineer or draftsman or something right now."

"Okay," York blurted. "And if he hadn't gone to school with the Old Man's wife, he'd be a goddam laborer like he's supposed to be."

Pretty soon you could hear a pin drop. Nobody looked at anybody. The foremen's shanty could have been a church or a funeral parlor for all the noise they made.

The Shop Steward said softly, "You shouldn't have said that, York. You sure shouldn't have said that. If the Old Man ever hears about it, the union couldn't help you!"

York's reddish face turned a sick white.

"Oh, I know you didn't mean it," the Shop Steward said. "You just shouldn't say things like that. Anyway, Bolden will start as foreman this morning."

He went out, then turned and stuck his head in the door and said, "Listen, fellas, you know how the Old Man feels. Part of your job is getting along with the other fella."

Alice lay on the davenport, her hands under her head, her elbows sticking upward, her feet up on the arm rest. She watched Duke as he went to the record machine and changed to hot jazz records.

He went to the davenport and she squeezed herself back to the high cushion so that he could sit down. He dropped on the davenport, swinging his long legs to one side so he could look into her face.

"It's funny how things turn out," she said.

"What's funny?"

"I think if it wasn't for Rida I'd do anything in the world for you. And I didn't think I'd ever be able to say that about anybody."

He didn't say anything.

"Do you think you'll marry her, Duke?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I don't think I'm good enough for her."

She said, "You're a goddam fool, Duke."

She was wearing a blue wool skirt and white blouse, and he opened the blouse. For a moment he worked at her brassiere.

"How do you get this thing off, Alice?"

She smiled. "You don't know anything at all about women's clothes, do you?"

"No."

"Well, you'll just have to find out. I won't tell you."

"Don't make me tear it off," he said.

She was breathing evenly. "I don't believe you would dare," she said.

He said nothing.

"Would you?" she insisted.

"No."

"I didn't think you would."

She lay there, breathing, listening to the music. Now she worked her leg to the music, moving it back and forth.

"Come on, Alice," he said.

"No."

"Why?"

"I can't."

"Why can't you?"

"There're just times when a girl can't, that's why."

"Oh!"

"Oh!" she mocked. Then she laughed. "You're just a baby, Duke. You're just a great big baby."

For a while they listened to the music.

"Duke."

"What?"

"Did you and Rida ever do—like this?"

He didn't answer her.

"Did you?" she insisted.

"No."

She said angrily, "You think she's too goddam good or something? You think she's that much better than me? You think she's some kind of angel just because she goes to church and teaches school? Do you, goddam it? Do you—do you?"

He was quiet.

"Don't sit up there as though you can't talk, Duke. Answer me. I mean it."

He said slowly, "I don't know, Alice. She's just not that kind, that's all."

The hurt showed on her face.

"I am, but she isn't, Duke?" she whispered.

He refused to say anything. Record after record dropped, and the jazz music filled the room. Alice shifted her body.

"The bitch," she said softly.

"Don't say that again, Alice!"

"Why?"

"Just don't say it."

"Then tell me why. Why, goddam it—why?"

"Because I don't want to hear it, that's why!"

"Do you love her, Duke?"

"I don't know."

"You lie! Do you love her? Do you—do you?"

"I guess so."

She beat on his back and shoulders with her fists.

All day long York brooded over the way they made a foreman of Duke Bolden. It didn't make sense, he thought. The Old Man just wouldn't make a colored foreman like that. Always he kept the colored fellows for laborers. Now

look how he had turned about-face. It didn't make any kind of sense.

And yet it did make sense. It made sense the way it made sense for the Old Man to get Duke out of prison. Before that he would never get a laborer out of jail. Before that the old man always said it was part of a laborer's job to keep out of trouble. But he had helped Duke Bolden.

It didn't make sense for the Old Man to marry a young girl, either. All these years he had been married to a whiskey bottle. But he had married a young girl who had gone to University the same time Duke Bolden went.

It made sense, all right. It made a nasty kind of sense.

That night he started watching the place where Duke Bolden stayed. He parked on the other side of the street from the apartment building, sitting low in his old car. He waited, patiently observing all movements on the quiet street.

It was quiet. Too quiet for the kind of colored neighborhood he was accustomed to. Then he noticed that, of the few people he saw, there were as many white as there were colored. White women as well as white men.

Smart, he thought. Duke lived in a mixed neighborhood, so nobody would notice a white woman going into the building. He wondered who had thought of that one, Duke or the Old Man's wife. You couldn't ever tell—Duke had gone to college.

He sat there and watched. Once he put a cigarette to his lips, started to light a match. Then he thought better of it.

He saw the blue Packard when it turned into the street with its woman driver. He bent low and waited. The car came on up the street, on the same side as the apartment building. It slowed up, and he felt the excitement pounding within him. He knew that the Old Man's wife owned a blue Packard. Everybody on the job knew that.

But the car did not stop. It went on at a crawl to the end

of the block and turned the corner, swinging right.

A wash of disappointment swept over him. Just another woman driver in a mixed neighborhood. He sat up straight, feeling disgust. He had been there well over an hour, and his patience was thin. Maybe he was dreaming, anyway. Maybe the Old Man just liked Duke, and his wife had nothing to do with it. Maybe all of the other stuff existed only in his head.

Suddenly he jerked his head down again, dodging the bright headlights, keeping far down. The same car had swung into the street again, and the woman had switched on her high beams, aiming them directly at his car. He remained down, sweat starting out on his forehead. The car had come to a stop, high beams still on—still aimed at his car. He was still, wondering if she had seen him duck. For minutes he crouched there, wondering.

At last the woman switched back to low beams. He eased up a little, watched, saw her pull the car over to the curbing two doors from the apartment house. The lights went off. She got out of the car. There was a pause after she slammed the door, and he guessed she was locking the car.

He saw her step away from the car and swiftly walk up the street to the apartment house. She yanked the outer door open and disappeared inside. But he had seen enough to know that she was white.

Tall and white.

He waited for an hour, but she did not come out. He started the motor of his car and drove away, turning the corner before he put on his lights.

That night he wrote on a plain piece of paper:

Dear Mr. Cannon,

You ought to stay home with your young wife sometime instead of always getting drunk. She's doing something you'd never think she'd do. If you don't think so, you

ought to stay sober some time and watch her when she thinks you are drunk.

He put this into a plain envelope, addressed it to Howard Cannon, the Cannon Building, city. In the lower right hand corner he wrote: Personal.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALL HIS MAIL was piled neatly on his desk. Most of it had to do with construction, and it had been opened. Which was proper. But there were four letters, placed to themselves, and he stared at them for some time. The top one was addressed to him, Howard Cannon. The name and the address was crudely printed. Frowning, he picked the four of them up, shuffled them, examining each one. Each one was addressed to him in the same crude printed style; on each one the word *personal* was printed. And, respecting this, they had been left unopened.

Very strange indeed, he thought. He had been away from the office many times, but never had he returned to find anything like this. He studied them again. All had been mailed in town, each at a different date.

He sat staring at them, wondering, feeling uneasy. If you kept going out getting drunk, he thought, something like this was bound to happen. He knew that such printed kind of things had to be slimy and unpleasant; he knew they had to have something to do with his drinking.

He hated to open the letters.

The easy way, he thought—the easy way and the sensible way—is to throw all four into the wastebasket. Or, better still, stick a match to them and forget them. Then go out and get drunk again.

Nothing good can come of opening them, he thought. Nothing good ever came of it. In all the history of anonymous letter-writing, no man ever profited by opening one of those slimy things.

He was afraid to open it.

Then the steel in him asserted itself. Slowly, deliberately, he tore one of them open with steady hands. He pulled the plain sheet of paper out of the envelope and spread it on the desk before him, noting that the words were printed. He stared at the words vacantly.

The telephone rang, and he reached for it automatically. "Mr. Lesser is here to see you," Miss Ruffin's voice said.

He held the telephone a long time.

"Tell Mr. Lesser I'm not in," he said at last.

He put the telephone down with trembling hand.

He sat staring at the printed words, his shoulders slumped, his short-cropped white hair looking thin. And somehow, just then, he looked all of his sixty-odd years.

Then, in a sudden burst of desperate energy, he opened the others. Each was worded differently, but each said the same thing. Each hinted at his wife's infidelity.

He picked up the phone. "Miss Ruffin," he said. "Who takes care of my mail during my absence?"

"Miss Copeland," she said. "She's in Accounting."

"Send Miss Copeland in," he ordered.

"Very well, Mr. Cannon."

Miss Copeland was a too-thin young woman with thick glasses.

"You sent for me, Mr. Cannon?"

"Miss Copeland, when did these letters come?"

"The ones marked personal? Why, they came at different times, sir. All during the past week."

"Have any like these ever come before?"

"No, sir. I'm sure not. I would have noticed them—they're so—unusual."

He said, "All right, Miss Copeland."

She hesitated. "Anything wrong, sir?"

"No, Miss Copeland. Nothing's wrong."

She went out of his office.

He took the letters again, read them one by one, frowning,

thinking, wondering. He studied the printing, studied the wording, not letting his mind dwell on the contents.

And then, like the tide, it washed over him. He could hold it off no longer. How many times could she trick him? First when she came to him, acting young and innocent, hiding her purpose. He had fallen. Next, when he picked her up, telling her how he felt, she had wormed her way into his hotel room. He had fallen for that, too. He had gone there, still believing her young and innocent. When he left that hotel she had already tricked him into marrying her.

After that he hadn't cared. Or he thought he hadn't cared.

Now he felt all the violent wrath of a man who had been made a fool of by another man. While he lay drunk in the hotel another man had been laughing at him as an old fool and a cuckold. Laughing, talking, enjoying himself. Who was it?

He picked up the telephone.

"Miss Ruffin," he said. "Bring me a telephone directory."

"Very well, Mr. Cannon."

When she brought him the directory she looked at him closely.

"Here you are, Mr. Cannon."

"Thank you, Miss Ruffin."

Miss Ruffin went out.

He turned to the yellow pages, flipped them rapidly. D. Dentists. Department Stores. Detective Agencies. He halted at Detective Agencies. Ace Detective Service. Apex Detective Syndicate. "This agency undertakes all legitimate detective work. Uniformed guards. Special police services. Offices in all principal cities."

The one about offices in all principal cities sold him on Apex. It was the same as his own firm—offices in all principal cities.

He picked up the telephone, and once more he was the Old Man, the man of steel and action.

"Miss Ruffin," he said, "get me the Apex Detective Syndicate, please."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cannon. I didn't quite understand you."

"The Apex Detective Syndicate," he repeated.

"Very well, Mr. Cannon. Just a moment, sir."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TELEPHONE RANG SHRILLY. She answered it, which was unusual. Most of the time she let one of the servants answer it. She seldom got telephone calls at the house anyway.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello—Alice?" It was Howard Cannon's voice, cool, crisp and business-like—and very sober. And it had all the steel in it.

"Yes?" she said.

"I want you to come down to the office, Alice."

It was a command. Quickly she looked at the clock. A quarter past ten. She got all tight inside.

"What is it?" she asked. "What do you want?"

"You come down here, Alice. Right away."

She heard the click of the receiver at the other end.

She put the telephone down. It's nothing, she told herself. It's nothing—nothing. He just wants me down there to talk over something—some little matter. But she knew she lied to herself. The Old Man had never called her down to the office. Not since their marriage.

She went out of the house and got into her blue Packard and drove down the winding road to the highway. For a long time she waited at the entrance to the highway, watching the trucks and passenger cars speed by. What a way, she thought. What a perfect way. If ever a person had to end it all. Just drive up to that intersection and wait. Wait until there was a string of trucks coming, one behind the other, speeding along. Wait for the right moment. Then step on the gas and shut your eyes.

For a moment she shut her eyes, and the old cruel smile played on her lips. In her mind she could hear the hissing

of air brakes. She could hear the wild, angry blasts of truck horns, the screech of tires. She could see the leading truck swerve to its left just before the impact, could hear the crashes, could see the pile-up. And trucks and passenger cars would all wrap up together, and everything would be just a mass of tangled steel and blood and battered bodies.

She must have sat there ten minutes before she shook herself out of it. The picture was firmly imprinted into her mind when she eased out into the highway and turned left for town. It was there, filed away, like some card in a filing cabinet.

When she got to the fifth floor of the Cannon Building, Miss Ruffin said, "You're to go right in, Mrs. Cannon."

Was there mockery in the woman's voice when she called her "Mrs. Cannon"? Or was she imagining things. Of one thing she was certain—Miss Ruffin looked at her with more than normal curiosity.

He was sitting at his desk the way she had seen him so many times. A big, full-faced, grey-haired old man, dead sober, with steel and guts showing in every expression.

For a moment she stood before him.

"Sit down, Alice."

She sat down.

"What do you want?" she asked. "Why did you call me down here this way?"

He smiled. And the way he did it, she could even see steel in the smile. He reached on the desk, picked up four envelopes, one at a time. He held the four of them toward her.

She looked at them without reaching for them.

"Go ahead," he said. "Take them. Take them and read them. Then you'll know why I called you down here."

She looked at them a long time, not wanting to take them. But she took them at last. She held the envelope there, looking at the address.

"Go ahead," he said. "See what's inside of it. Or have you guessed?"

She pulled the letter out and tried to keep her hands from

shaking. Her whole body was trembling. She could hear Howard Cannon breathing on the other side of the desk. She knew what would be in the letter. Once she looked at him and saw that his face was like a grey steel trap, she knew.

She read it once. Then she thrust it from her.

"Go ahead," he said. "Read the others."

She shook her head. "They would all be the same."

"Yes," he said. "They're all the same."

His voice was hard and void of mercy.

"It's a lie," she said. "It's a dirty lie!"

"No," he told her. "I got them almost two weeks ago. I've had you followed ever since."

She hated him then. She hated his sight. She hated the bigness of him, his age, his white hair, and the steel guts inside him.

He said, "Well, Alice, I guess you got caught." And he laughed.

"I didn't mean it," she said. "It just started. You were always somewhere drunk, and I was lonely—and—and I just got started—"

His voice was soft and natural. "I didn't go at this half-way, Alice. I put a bunch of private detectives on your trail. I should have done it long ago. I sent them up to University and had them do some investigating. You'd be surprised with the things I learned."

"All right," she said. "All right," she whispered. "I made a mistake. Give me a chance. Give me one more chance."

"I'll give you a break. I'll give you a good break, Alice. I'm going to let you get out of this town. I'm going to let you got out the way you came in. Broke."

"I made a mistake," she said wildly. "I didn't mean to have anything to do with Duke. He just kept after me—"

She heard him laughing, and she stopped. She stared at him.

"I had a look at your bank account," he said. "I had a look at all your canceled checks. You spent a fortune on that boy just before they paroled him. That looks like you were

after him. You bought him clothes, you bought furniture, and bought a brand-new car for him. You should've known better, Alice. Any moron would have sense enough to draw the money out of the bank and pay cash for things like that."

She was quiet for a long time. She tried to think, but there was nothing to think about. There was nothing she could do. Still she thought, seeking a way out.

"What about Duke?" she asked.

"Duke," he said. "That puppy!" Then his voice became low and hard. "I played with a puppy, and he licked me in the mouth. I don't like to be licked in the mouth by a puppy—especially a black puppy."

He thought for a long time.

"I'll let him alone," he said. "I'll let him alone until I finish with you. Then I'll turn him over to York. Did you ever see York drive a man? I'll turn him over to York and let York drive him until he has to quit. Then I'll turn him over to his parole officer. But first I'll have a nice, long talk with his parole officer. I'll make sure he gets everything that's coming to him."

She felt something crawling inside her. For the first time she knew the kind of man Howard Cannon was. For the first time she saw inside him. For all his drunken ways, he was ruthless; he enjoyed crushing people. Looking at him she could see how it had been with him all his life, why he had never married before, how he could stay drunk most of the time and still maintain a firm grip on his construction company. He crushed everyone who crossed him.

She stared at him. "You're cruel," she said. "God, how cruel you are!"

He said, "You used to be pretty cruel yourself, Alice. Remember? You didn't do so bad yourself at University. But you got soft. You let a puppy make you soft." He laughed. "It's funny about women, Alice. They can be as mean as they come. But they meet some two-legged puppy, and they go soft inside."

She said nothing. She could think of nothing to say.

"I guess that's about all, Alice," he said. "I'm giving you a break. I'm getting drunk again. I don't know how long I'll stay drunk—maybe four days, maybe a week. But while I'm drunk I want you to get out, you hear? I want you to get out of town and stay out."

"I don't have to get out," she said. "You can't make me."

"Alice," he said, his voice hard now. "I'm giving you a week. Don't make it hard on yourself. You get out like I tell you."

"And if I don't?"

"If you don't," he said, and his voice was ruthless, "if you don't, I'll kick you out!"

She sat there frozen, knowing that he meant it, that he would enjoy doing it.

"I don't care about what you did, Alice," he said. "I don't care about you and that—that black puppy. But somebody else knows about it. Somebody is laughing at me—at Howard Cannon. Somebody is thinking I'm a soft old man—a sucker. I don't want them to laugh at me, Alice. I don't want them to think I'm soft. I don't want them to think Howard Cannon's wife can lay with a young black puppy like a bitch in heat."

She got up and walked out of his office. Four days to a week to get out of town. She knew she had to get out. He was rich and powerful and ruthless, and he could kick her out and get away with it. He could do anything he wanted and get away with it.

She rode down in the elevator and got into her blue Packard and drove back toward the house.

"The slob," she said, "the big, drunken, half-assed slob!"

And now that she was away from him her mind started working, groping for some escape. She could fight as hard as he could. She had a nature as cruel as his own. Given the same terms, the same weapons, and she would have no fear of him. But all over the state he was a big man. He could give orders and everyone would listen to him, from the

people in city hall all the way down to the cop on the beat. He could use all his money and influence, and she had no weapons equal to those.

She turned from the highway into the little asphalt road and started the steep ascent up to the house. For a moment she got half an idea, for a moment a thin thread of thought of the little road and the highway as a possible weapon ran through her mind.

But nothing clicked.

When she got to the house she sat in the car with a thousand thoughts running through her head. She couldn't bother with Duke now. It would take a long time to work up something with Duke, and she had to do something right away.

She beat her hands against the steering wheel.

If only something would happen to him. If only his heart would stop on him. Please, God, let his heart stop on him right now! If only he would get killed. If he would have a smash-up.

A smash-up?

Unerringly her mind went again to the little road and the highway. Maybe, if she could get him drunk enough and get him to drive. But no—he never had an accident. Drunk or sober, he never had one.

Then make him have one.

She thought of all the faked accidents she had read about in books and seen in the movies. Getting a man in a car and shoving it off over a cliff. Driving a car to the edge and then jumping out just as it was about to go over.

But always there was something wrong. Police examined the car afterward and found it in the wrong gear or in neutral or the door open when it had no right to be. Or something.

She stared straight ahead of her, a thin thread of something pressing at her mind.

Suddenly she jumped straight up in the car. It hit her like a man's hard fist, stunning her. It was right there before her.

Quickly she sat under the wheel. She started the motor and shifted the gear to "drive," keeping her feet on the brakes, feeling the gentle tug of the motor against the brakes. Now she put her foot on the gas pedal, pressing down, hearing the great roar of the Packard's motor. But her left foot was on the brake pedal, and the car did not move.

Suddenly she took her foot off the brake keeping the other foot on the gas pedal. The car leaped forward. She braked the car to a stop. She sat there trembling, her breath coming in little jerks.

"God!" she said. "God—God!"

And she wondered if, in all the world, anybody had thought the same thing she was thinking. In the old days, with the hand shift, a person had to drive a car into a road or over an embankment, jumping out at the last minute. There was no such thing as an automatic shift in those days. If they stepped on the gas with the hand brakes on, the motor choked.

She thought rapidly. How much weight would it take to hold the gas pedal down? She looked around, searching for a stone or something, any weight. But the grounds were orderly, the grass and hedges neatly trimmed, with no loose stone or anything.

No matter, she thought. I can handle that.

In her mind she had it all worked out. She had to get the Old Man into the car. He had to be drunk—dead drunk. She had to drive him down the winding asphalt road to the entrance to the highway. She would put on the hand brake, put a heavy weight on the gas pedal, so that the pedal would be all the way down to the floor and the motor straining against the hand brake. All this time Howard Cannon would be sitting in the car in a drunken stupor.

She would get out of the car, first rolling the window down. The gas pedal would be down to the floor, the motor roaring, the car straining against the hand brake. She would reach through the window into the car, holding the hand brake. She would watch the highway until a long line of

trucks came speeding along. She would make sure that passenger cars were speeding over the other two lanes. Then, at just the right time, she would release the hand brake and jump clear of the leaping car. The car would surge into the highway in front of the speeding truck, and the inevitable crash would follow with many trucks and passenger cars involved.

She started the motor and drove the car back down the private asphalt road to the highway. For long hours she sat with the blue Packard parked at the entrance to the highway, watching the way the big trailer-trucks and passenger cars came speeding away from town.

She would fix the Old Man.

CHAPTER XXX

BY THE TIME NIGHT CAME she knew just what she was going to do and how she was going to do it. A quiet excitement started worming its way deep down inside her and washed upward. She had been hard many times, just for the hell of it. She had been deliberately cruel. She had hurt men just to see what they would do about it.

Now it was different. She had to be hard; she had to meet steel with steel. The Old Man had to die. There it was—hard, cold, and final.

She went to the telephone and dialed Duke's number. She heard it ring twice before he answered.

"Hello," he said.

"Duke," she said, "will you be home tonight?"

There was a little pause.

"No," he said. "I'm going—out tonight. Why?"

"No, Duke," she said quickly. "No—stay home tonight."

"Why, Alice? Why?"

"Something terrible's happened, Duke. He knows about us. The Old Man knows."

There was a long, stunned silence.

"You've got to stay home, Duke. You just have to."

"But why, Alice? Tell me why."

She said angrily, "Oh, what does it matter why? You just stay home tonight, that's all."

"I can't, Alice. I promised Rida. There's a formal dance tonight, and I promised to take her."

Damn! Too many things pressing her.

"Duke," she said, "can't you understand? The Old Man knows about us. He's going to put me out. He's going to send you back to jail."

"I'm sorry, Alice."

There was no excitement in his voice, no emotion—no nothing.

"Duke," she said. "Please, Duke. Don't you understand what he'll do? He'll ruin us. He'll ruin both of us."

"But what can we do, Alice? We can't do anything."

"You stay home," she said, evenly, slowly. "You've got to stay home." There was a silence. "You hear me?" she said. "You stay home tonight."

Once more, there was silence. And then, as though torn from his soul, Alice heard his voice. "All right, Alice. I'll be home. Good-by." There was a click. She almost fell, so sudden and exhausting was the relief.

She waited until it was ten o'clock. She went out and got into the blue Packard, putting the book on the seat beside her. She drove down the little road to the highway and headed for town.

Phil Russo stood beside her in the room. On the bed before them Howard Cannon lay sprawled on his back, fully clothed, one hand flung out at right angle to his body. His eyes were closed and there were beads of sweat on his forehead.

"I don't know," the bellboy said. "It'd be pretty hard to get him out of here, Mrs. Cannon."

She said, "We've got to get him out, Phil. I want him home. I need him home."

"All right, Mrs. Cannon." He looked doubtfully at the hulking form.

"We'll take him down the freight elevator and out the back way," she said smoothly. "I wouldn't want people to see us taking him through the lobby in his condition."

"But how're you going to handle him then?" Phil asked. "I can't leave the hotel. How're you going to get him into the car and take him home?"

"Oh, that's all taken care of," she said. "One of the colored boys who works for him—Duke—he's outside in the car. He's going to drive back. He'll help me get him in the car." She paused for a second, then repeated for emphasis, "The colored boy will be able to handle him all right. Just help me get him out of here."

"All right, Mrs. Cannon."

They caught him together, pulling him from the bed to his feet. He mumbled something, but did not open his eyes. His knees bent, and they had to support his weight between them. He kept muttering.

They carried him out of the room and back along the hall to the freight elevator. Now the elevator began its slow creaking descent; while they supported the drunk man, letting him lean against the side of the elevator. She was talking to the bellboy, telling him how she wanted her husband home, not giving him any time to think.

"Just help me get him out of here," she repeated, "and the colored boy—Duke—will help me then. You won't even have to come out to the car."

She kept mentioning the colored boy—kept calling Duke's name—making sure the bellboy would remember. She was doing what she had to do.

The elevator came to a stop, and they carried him between them to the back door. Now and then he muttered as he moved his rubbery legs, his big body slumping forward.

"All right, Phil," she said. "I think I can manage."

"You sure you can make it, Mrs. Cannon?"

"The colored boy will help me," she said. "Just hold the door open while I get him outside."

She knew she should tip him, but she didn't want to take the time. She wanted to get out of there. The bellboy held the door open; she guided him out and walked him lurchingly to the parked car. Twice he stumbled, almost falling and pulling her down, but she held onto him grimly.

When she reached the car she leaned him against it, holding him with one arm and pressing her body hard against his to keep him from falling. With her free hand she opened the door. She pulled him to the open door and half lifted, half pushed him into the car. She quickly slammed the door, went around to the other side of the car and got in. She started the motor and headed out of town.

He was still out when she got to the little asphalt road leading to the house. She turned into the road, thinking of all the things whiskey could do to a man. Here he was, a weakling, a baby. He was a man of steel, but right now whiskey had melted all the steel in him.

He would die with the steel melted.

She drove all the way up to the house. Just in case, she thought. She had her story straight. We drove him to the house, she would say. The colored boy and I—we drove him to the house and got him inside. Then the colored boy went home. I tried to get him upstairs, but he'd started getting sober, and he wouldn't go. Said he was going back to the hotel. I told him he couldn't go—we had left his car in the hotel garage and come home in mine. He said that was all right, he'd take mine. I tried to stop him, but he wouldn't listen to me.

She drove back down the little road to the highway. There she stopped the car and cut off the lights, leaving the motor running.

The traffic was heavy. She sat there watching the truck headlights as they came roaring along the highway, feeling the mounting excitement of seeing her plan nearing completion.

Now she was going to do what she had to do.

She pulled the car a little closer to the highway, the lights still out. No need to give the trucks the warning of headlights, no use to help any. With the lights off the car could shoot out there, and the truck would hit it almost before the driver saw the car.

She put on the hand brake and shifted the gear to "drive." Experimenting, she stepped on the gas pedal, pressed down hard. The hand brake held. Now she took the heavy book and lay it on the gas pedal. The heavy book held the pedal all the way down, the motor roared and strained against the hand brake.

Howard Cannon did not move.

She got out of the car and closed the door, leaving the window down. Howard Cannon was slouched against the opposite door. The roar of the motor sounded louder on the outside.

Reaching through the window into the car, she caught the hand brake. For a long time she stood there, her hand on the brake, her eyes on the traffic, her body taut. She watched, calculating, timing.

At last she saw what she was looking for. A big truck that looked as high and long as a freight car came speeding down the highway. She could see the headlights, the lights high up on the trailer, and far to the rear she could see the red glow of lights at the back of the truck. Behind this truck came two more, all in line. To the other side were the passenger cars.

She waited until the last split second, then jerked off the hand brake, throwing herself backward at the same time. The car shot forward into the highway, and the big truck came roaring down upon it. The driver didn't seem to see the car at all; he never let up on the accelerator. She braced herself against the shock.

The blasting, roaring crash was louder and more terrible than anything she could have imagined. The blue Packard seemed to lift up and fly over into the passenger car lane.

After that there was nothing but screeching brakes and reverberating crashes slamming with all the awfulness of the bottom falling out of the world.

She stood there, and for a while she felt her insides crawling up and down. It's happened, she thought. My God, it's happened. All that wreckage, all that tangled steel out there, strewn all along the highway. Those trucks and all those cars.

Suddenly she shook her fist at the highway. "Now let's see you kick me out of town," she cried. "Now let's see you do it!"

Then she started laughing. And strangely enough, she did not think of all the others out there on the highway—she did not think of all the other lives sacrificed so that one man could die.

All she thought of was how she had triumphed over the cruel man who was going to kick her out of town.

Still laughing, she turned at last. She walked the long way up the asphalt road to the house.

When she got to the house she looked back. Out on the highway there was the lonely wail of a siren.

CHAPTER XXXI

IT WAS ALMOST ONE when the two men from the highway patrol came. One of them was about forty, the other was young, almost a kid. The older one did the talking.

"You Mrs. Cannon?"

"Yes."

His face was grim.

"Your husband's had an accident."

She let them see the shock on her face, let them see the fright.

"How? Was he hurt—?" She let her words break off.

"He's dead," he said in a low voice.

"What are you talking about?" she said. "He can't be."

"He pulled out into the highway in front of a truck," the

man said in a flat voice. "He just shot out. The truck hit him and wrecked, and another truck hit the first truck. After that there was a pile-up. Trucks and cars and everything."

"I was afraid of something like that," she said. "I knew he shouldn't be driving in his condition."

The patrolman looked at her sharply, questioning. She told him then how she and the colored boy had brought him home, how she had tried to get him upstairs.

"He wouldn't come upstairs," she said. "I tried to keep him, but he took my car and left. And now he's—he's—" She started crying.

The patrolman's face was angry.

"It's murder," he said. "That's what it is. All those people out there dead just because a drunken fool—" He broke off. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Cannon. You go ahead and try to sleep. Tomorrow I guess somebody will come for you—"

When they had gone she went into the house and poured a good, stiff drink of scotch and drank it straight. Then she went to the telephone.

The telephone rang and rang, but Duke did not answer. Alice froze there for a moment. *He said he'd stay home. But*—And once more, the relief was so great she felt faint. There was the unmistakable sound of the circuit going through, as a hand picked the phone from its cradle.

But the voice was not Duke's. It was a woman's voice, soft with sleep, sweet-thick with sleep.

At first Alice thought she had dialed the wrong number. And then she knew she hadn't. The voice, though small and blurred, was a voice she had heard before. It was Rida Malloy's voice.

Alice scarcely recognized her own voice. "Is—is Duke there, please? I have to talk with him."

There was a pause, and this time the thickness had dropped away. "Yes, just a minute." And again, the pause.

And this time, Duke's voice. "Hello," he said. "This is Duke."

"Duke," Alice said, "Duke, I want you to come here—now, Duke."

"Is this Alice?" he said. His voice was strange, too, but not from sleep.

"Yes," she said, her heart beating savagely now, "yes, this is Alice and please don't talk any more. Just come, Duke. You've got to come here."

"What are you talking about, Alice?"

She felt like crying out. What was wrong with him? She didn't understand him. And for a terrible moment, she realized she had never understood him, not really. For there he was, in bed with Rida, Rida the sweet one, Rida the untouched, Rida who lay next to him now, her body pressed warmly against his.

"Listen," she said, her words, choked as they were, still coming fast, "listen, Duke. He's dead. He's dead and you've got to help me. Oh, Duke, please, please come."

No sound came over the telephone except his breathing.

"Alice," he said at last, "what have you gone and done now?"

"It was an accident," she said. "He was killed in an automobile accident. The highway patrol came and told me. But I've got to see you, Duke. Please, please." Her last words fell into sobs.

"I'm sorry, Alice," he said. "I can't."

Her sobs broke off suddenly. She shrieked into the phone. "It's her. It's Rida who won't let you come. She's keeping you back. Your little innocent Rida, bitch that she is." And this time her tears came full and strong, honest, beaten tears. "Oh, Duke, Duke, please come to me. I need you, Duke."

When he answered, she wondered why she had never known of this side of Duke. Neither soft nor hard. Just distant. "I'm sorry, Alice. Rida and I were married this evening. I'm afraid I can't help you any more. Good-by."

She stared into the dead phone. And then silently she put it back on its cradle, and just as silently she folded to the floor, her head resting on her arms and her tears flowed

down her cheeks and she felt enormously sorry for herself, and very, very tired.

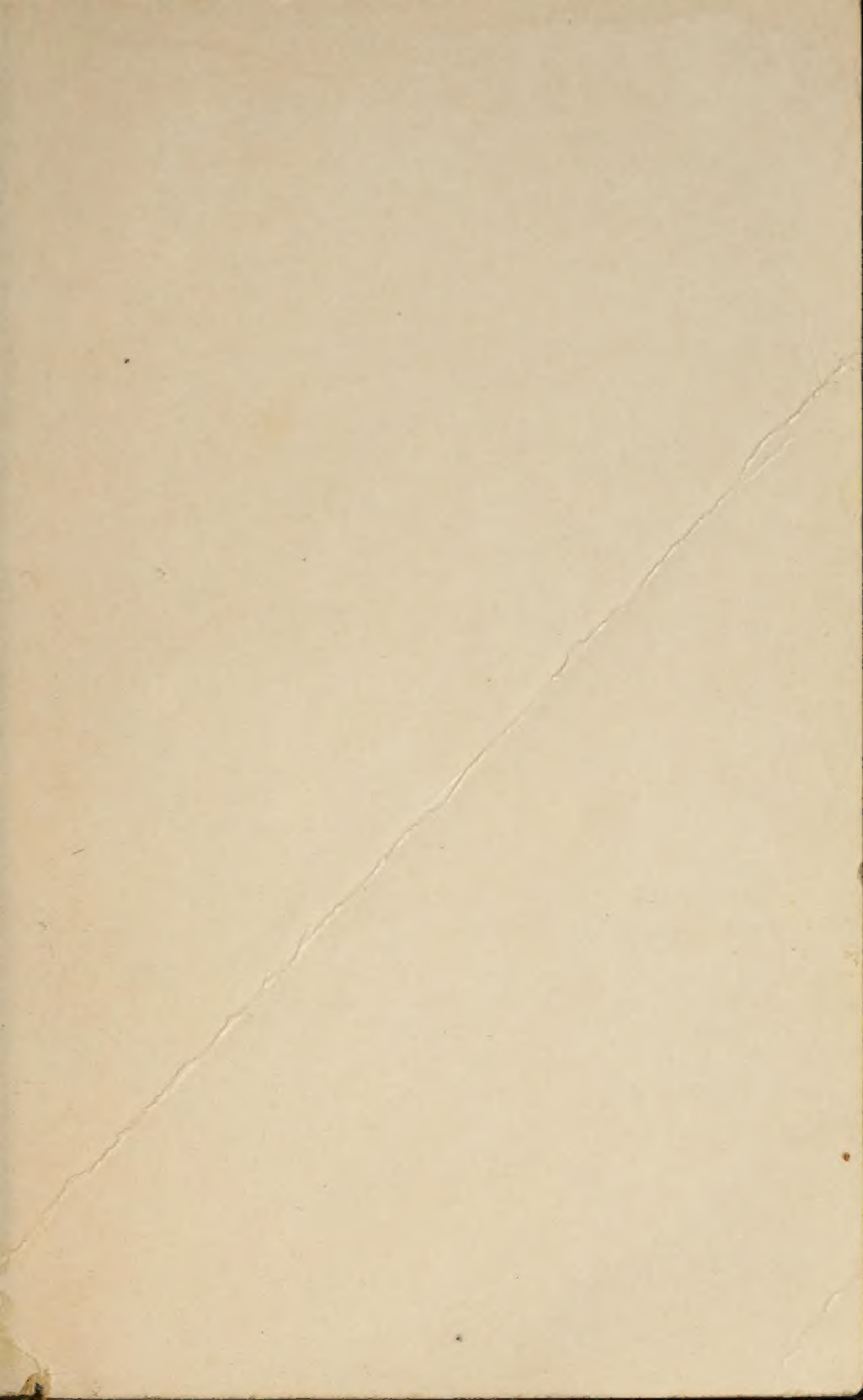
It was almost five in the morning when the police came for her. She was sitting in her room, on the floor, her head cocked toward the record player. She held up a hand to them, imperiously. The police officers, two of them, stood off a distance, and waited. She hummed lightly, with the song:

There was a lady from the town,
Low, so low, so lonely,
She walked her up, and she walked her down,
Down by the greenwood sidey,

First she leaned upon an oak—
First it bent, and then it broke—

She snapped off the machine and stood up. Her mouth was plain and straight and lovely. She looked astonishingly young and untouched.

THE END



**"the story that will shock you
out of your skin..."**

**She was a white woman.
He was Negro.**

*And so they drifted in
passion . . . two people alone
. . . their arms locked around
each other as though, in em-
brace, they could hold off
the rest of the world. . . .*

